LOYAL · HEARTS AND · TRUE

BY

E. EVERETT-GREEN

IN THE DAYS OF QUEEN ELIZABETH

Ernest Collyer

Sunday School Prize

Lower Beeding Crossways

P. W. Powell

Vicar

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LOYAL HEARTS.

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A Tale of the Days of Queen Bess

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E. EVERETT-GREEN

QUEEN ELIZABETH

T. NELSON & SONS

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Loyal Hearts and True

A Tale of the Days of Queen Elizabeth

By

E. EVERETT-GREEN

Author of "In the Days of Chivalry," "The Church and the King," "The Lord of Dynevor," &c. &c.

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LOYAL HEARTS.

CHAPTER I.

AN OLD ENGLISH HOUSEHOLD.

"NOW hold up, lad, and pluck up heart of grace. An we be not let on our way with any farther molestation from these light-heeled gentlemen of the road, we must reach a halting-place ere long. I would it were I, not you, who had felt their cold steel; but once let us see ourselves free from this wood, and it will fare ill if we find not a hostelry where we can get rest and shelter for the night. The road is something better now. Canst make shift to push on faster? It would be safer to be clear of the forest before the sun sets."

The speaker was a tall, spare man of some seven or eight and twenty summers, whose thin brown face, keen eyes, and quick, watchful movements seemed to indicate that he had been brought up to the profession of arms, and that he had seen service under hotter suns than those of his native England. He was plainly dressed, as became a traveller along lonely roads, in a doublet of brown cloth

protected by a strong corselet of leather; and over his shoulders hung a cloak of Spanish fashion, rich in texture, though stained by weather, and bearing tokens of having done good service in its time. Leathern breeches and riding boots, a small ruff and beaver cap, completed his costume; and so plain and simple was his dress that but for the unconscious air of command he wore, and a certain high-bred look not easily to be described, or perhaps from the fact that two well-mounted servants followed closely behind him, he might have passed for no higher in rank than a servant himself.

His companion was a youth of nineteen, with a fair, beardless face, and a cheek as smooth as a girl's. His plumed velvet cap, embroidered velvet doublet, and costly Flemish cloak, together with his scented gloves and the rich chasing of the hilt of his sword, betrayed that he at least laid claim to rank or wealth. Yet the melancholy cast of the features, the thoughtful sadness of the liquid hazel eyes, and the lack of youthful buoyancy and light-heartedness, seemed to indicate a life that was anything but full of pleasure; and there were not wanting those who, in those days of superstition and credulity, would shake their heads as they looked into the beautiful face, and say that early doom was written there.

Just now that face was white as death, and the lad's left arm was wrapped in a large white kerchief that was soaked through and through with blood. His drooping attitude bespoke the exhaustion of faintness; and though at his companion's words and look of kindly solicitude he

rallied himself, as if half ashamed of his weakness, and nodded an assent, it was very plain to the experienced eye of the soldier that he would be unable to travel much farther that night.

And to be benighted in the New Forest, and forced to encamp there with a wounded comrade and no provisions, on a chill evening in March, was no pleasant prospect, even for one pretty well inured to hardship. Already they had had rough experience of the treatment to which an unwary traveller might be exposed; and as the town of Romsey could not be very far distant, it seemed advisable to push onwards if possible, and either halt there for the night, or at least strive to gain some small inn, or even some woodman's cabin, where they would have a roof over their heads, and some sort of bed for the wounded lad.

It was now between five and six in the afternoon. The sun was not yet set in the clear, steely blue sky, but the tall trees of the forest obscured the light, and dusk fell prematurely in the stately aisles of the great wood. Still the improvement in the nature of the road beneath them gave hopes that they were approaching more populated parts; and as the tired horses pushed gallantly forward at a steady hand-gallop, the hopes of their riders were shortly realized by the gradual increase of light on their path as the trees grew thinner, till at length a sharp turn brought them to the banks of a stream, which they were able to cross by means of a rude bridge of planks.

On the opposite bank there were abundant signs of the proximity of man. Well-tilled farm-land stretched before

them, the young corn sprouting from the brown furrows. Green meadows lay in the fertile valley of the river, and herds of sheep and cattle cropped the grass that was beginning to grow luxuriantly after its winter sleep. The rising ground beyond hid from the eyes of the travellers the homestead which they knew could not be very far away; but as they drew rein to look about them, the sound of a boy's voice not far distant assured them of the presence of fellow-creatures, and the elder man raised a shout which speedily brought the owner of the voice bounding to his side.

He was a handsome, bright-faced lad of fifteen, and as he saw what manner of men these strangers were, he doffed his cap with no ungraceful gesture and hurried to their side.

"We are on the road to Romsey, and thence to Winchester," said the elder man, bending down from his saddle; "but the forest roads have been perplexing, and we had the misfortune to fall in with a band of marauders, who have rough-handled my young companion here. Thus it follows that we are in danger of being benighted; wherefore could you direct us to some house near at hand where we could gain accommodation for the night, we should be greatly beholden to you. How far do you call it to the nearest inn?"

"Three mile of villanous bad road," cried the boy, "and then such an ill place as I would not have my dog to lodge in. But my father's house is but a bow-shot from here, and were I not to bring you thither I should be

well chidden by him for discourtesy. There is room enough and to spare for you and your servants; and your comrade looks as if he had ridden already farther than he should. An you will follow the road, I will run forward and give notice of your coming. And here is my sister Ursula, doubtless coming in search of me. She will tell you the same."

The boy had already bounded off, full of the hospitable excitement which was the regular accompaniment of the appearance of travellers in days when posts were unknown, and the news of the realm was passed from mouth to mouth, and important national events were often unknown for weeks in the remoter parts of the country. As he dashed towards the house, he paused for one brief minute to exchange words with a tall and stately maiden who was seen slowly approaching as if from the house; and she, after a moment's hesitation, continued to advance, returning the courtly bows of the horsemen with a graceful reverence, after the fashion of the day. She wore no cap upon her braided locks, and her dress was very simple: a kirtle of blue cloth, with open bodice of the same, the ruff, sleeves, and under waistcoat being of fine cambric of snowy whiteness. The sleeves were cut very high on the shoulders, as modern ladies have a fancy for wearing them now; and the effect of the whole costume was pleasing and graceful, free from any of the extravagances which the fine ladies of the court loved to indulge, the Queen herself being in no way behind her ladies in love for novelty and quaint conceits, generally more curious than beautiful.

The elder traveller sprang from his horse and met the lady bareheaded. He spoke a few words of explanation and apology, but he was cut short by a smile and a gesture of comprehension, as the girl her brother had spoken of as Ursula turned her eyes on the drooping figure of the wounded youth.

"Methinks no time should be lost in bringing him to safe shelter," she said in a clear and pleasant voice, at once free from constraint or forwardness. "My mother is a better leech than any in the country round, and has many unguents that are much sought after for the cure of sword-thrusts and such like. I pray you ride on without delay. No traveller ever passes this way without a welcome from Wyndgate Manor; for such my father's house is called."

Throwing his rein over his arm, the traveller walked on beside his fair guide.

"May I inquire the name of my conductress?" he asked, with the directness of a soldier, omitting the flowery adjectives that a courtier would have used in like case.

"I am called Ursula Furnival," she answered with equal simplicity. "We are a large family. It was my youngest brother you spoke to first; his name is Gilbert."

"And mine is Peregrine Bertie," replied the traveller, with a sidelong glance to see if the name conveyed anything to her; but she did not appear to have heard it before. And he continued, with a backward glance at his companion, "He is young Lord Beauchamp, the son of the ill-fated Lady Katherine Grey, who was privately

married to Edward Seymour, Earl of Hertford, eldest son of the Duke of Somerset. Doubtless you have heard the story—how she was thrown into the Tower for having dared to marry without the consent of the Queen's Majesty, she being by the will of King Henry the Eighth next in the succession. My comrade there was born in the Tower, where so many of his race both before and since have met a terrible doom. It seems at times as if the shadow of the axe has rested upon him from his cradle."

Ursula, with a start of surprise and unwonted interest, cast a quick glance behind her at the drooping figure of the lad. Could it be possible that they were really about to receive beneath their roof the nephew of the Lady Jane Grey, whose stainless life and tragic death had been the favourite romance of their childhood, and about whom so much tender regret and admiration have always lingered, and always will? Of the other sisters, Katherine and Mary, she knew less, but the name of the former was familiar as being always brought forward in discussions upon the vexed point of the succession; and if this was indeed the eldest son, his prospective right to the crown was still upheld by some, should the Queen die unmarried, as was only too probable now, although the nation as a nation, were in favour of the title of the young King of Scots.

But the burden of a sustained conversation with a stranger was not left long to Ursula, for as they neared the house her father came hurrying out, and beside him her second brother, Ivo, who, as soon as the little cavalcade drew up at the

gate, called to the servants to lead away the horses, whilst he helped Lord Beauchamp to dismount, and supported him into the house; for the youth was so spent with loss of blood that he could scarce set one foot before the other.

Wyndgate Manor was an ancient building, to which considerable additions had been made during the life of the present owner. The small, ill-lighted chambers of the old house were now relegated to the servants; and the master and his family were lodged more commodiously than their forefathers had dreamed of being. The travellers were conducted across a court-yard, and up a flight of steps, at the top of which a pair of heavy doors, now wide open, gave entrance into a very large room or hall, which was in fact the living room of the family on all ordinary occasions—the place where they sat at work and where all their meals were taken.

Ample evidence of this promiscuous habitation was visible as the travellers entered, for at one end of the hall a group of three girls was gathered round an embroidery frame, their labours being apparently directed by the lady of the house; whilst at the lower end of the big place, partly concealed by a screen, which looked as if it had once stood in a church, the servants were laying the table for the universal six-o'clock supper.

"Wife!" called out the master of the house as his foot crossed the threshold, "there is work for your clever fingers over there," indicating by a gesture the young nobleman, who was some paces behind. "The lad has got an ugly scratch, it seems, and has lost more blood than he can

well spare; but he will soon forget his troubles when he has felt the touch of thy motherly hands;" and with that he whispered a few words into the ear of his wife that evoked first a start of surprise and then a look of keen interest as Ivo led in the wounded lad. With a courtly reverence to Mr. Bertie, who was at her husband's side, she passed on to the pair behind, and, the motherly instinct roused at once at the condition of young Lord Beauchamp, she dispensed with all ceremony and took law into her own hands.

"Bring him hither, my son, and lay him down gently—so.—Honora, my child, bring those cushions, and fetch yonder rug to wrap about him. And hasten and bring me the ointment and linen, and such things as are needed in the dressing of wounds. Thou knowest best what they are; and bid the wench bring me water; and come thyself to help me, for thou hast the steadiest hands and quickest eye."

A tall, slim girl, with chestnut locks, deep blue eyes, and a complexion of dazzling fairness, sprang hastily to comply with these demands; whilst Ursula beckoned to the two, who still stood beside the embroidery frame, looking curiously upon the scene, and they all hastened away to make ready the rooms for the travellers' reception. For in those simpler days there was nothing strange in the employment of the daughters of the house in work that would now be performed exclusively by servants. The household linen was spun by the busy fingers of the mistress and her daughters, and many culinary tasks were performed by them as a matter of course. And on any emergency, such

as a sudden arrival of this kind, the daughters made nothing of preparing the guest-chambers with their own hands; and fast and eagerly their tongues wagged, as the elder sister explained to them the rank and parentage of one of their guests.

Meantime Lord Beauchamp, who had been made comfortable upon the oak settle, which stood snugly in the ingle nook at the upper end of the big hall, began to understand something of what was going on, and take cognizance of his surroundings. Ivo had brought him at his father's bidding "a stoup of wine," which had done much to restore him, and he began to look about him with some interest, and wonder into what manner of place they had found their way.

He could see from the fine proportions of the hall, the polished oak of the floor, the skins of wild beasts which covered it in places (some of them beasts unknown in England), and many other tokens of wealth and refinement, that it was no mere farm-house which sheltered them, albeit the house stood in the midst of carefully-tilled land. But what most attracted the fancy of the youth was the sweet, calm face of Mrs. Furnival, as she busied herself about him, and his large hazel eyes, with their natural wistful melancholy of expression, fixed themselves persistently upon it.

And in truth there was much that was attractive in that countenance, much which inspired love and confidence in all who looked upon it. Mrs. Furnival was taller than women are wont to be, and her figure still retained its youthful

grace and alertness, though full of matronly dignity Her brown hair, which was still abundant and untouched by the hand of time, was hidden away beneath a cap or coif of the fashion which has taken its name in more modern days from the hapless Queen of Scots, who habitually wore it. Her dress was scarcely less simple than that of her daughters, the lace edge to her ruff and the velvet waistcoat alone distinguishing it from theirs; but the youth thought that many a court beauty wore her rich robes with far less dignity and stateliness, and might well envy alike the tranquil sweetness of this motherly face and the clear rich tones of her voice.

The slim, fair girl, whom in the first confusion he had not observed, had returned now, and was preparing to assist Mrs. Furnival to dress the wound. Both women seemed familiar enough with such an office; and Beauchamp thought the hurt was well got that received such tender handling. He was spent and exhausted from loss of blood, and had small disposition to talk; but he observed all that went on about him, and was well content with what he saw.

"It was an ugly thrust; but I trust it will trouble you but little after a few days' rest," said the elder lady, when her last bandage was arranged. "How did it chance, my lord? Was it from the hand of some of those wild fellows, who are the terror of travellers in the forest?"

"It would not have chanced save for my own imprudence," answered the young man. "My friend had warned me not to stray alone into the wood, as travellers from the

coast are more in peril than any others, seeing they may have Spanish gold about them, or treasures from the Indies; but at the noon-day halt I forgot the caution, and wandered alone into a fair glade; and the next thing I knew was that I was surrounded by a band of wild fellows demanding my purse and my jewels; and if my good comrade and his stout servants had not been within sound of my voice, it might have gone hardly with me. As it was, I escaped with only this scratch, which would have been naught had it not bled so determinedly."

The youth was secretly a little ashamed at being thus prostrated by so slight a hurt. In those days of adventure and constantly threatening warfare, little account was made of blows or wounds, and Beauchamp, whose ambition it was to imitate his companion in the profession of arms, felt as if he had made an ignominious beginning; but the fleeting glances from Honora's violet eyes made amends for much, and to be permitted to lie still on the settle, whilst she remained beside him to cut up his meat, and otherwise attend upon him when the rest of the household gathered round the distant table, was not an arrangement with which he was disposed to quarrel.

The lad could not eat, even to please her; but he begged her to stay beside him, and eat the food provided for himself, whilst she told him of herself and of others; for it was a goodly company that had assembled at the table, and Beauchamp was not devoid of the natural curiosity of youth.

"Fair mistress," he began, "I prithee tell me if thou art

not daughter to yonder gracious lady whom they call Mrs. Furnival? And are those fair maidens I see around her your sisters? Methinks I see a likeness in twain to the mother, but I can trace it but little in thee."

"Alas, no! I am no daughter of the house—would that I were," said Honora with a smile and a sigh. "And yet I mean no disloyalty to my good father in so saying. Yet I am never so happy as when I am here, beneath the roof of my sweet aunt; and when I am taken home for a season, I do but count the days till I may return."

"Then you are near of kin to those that dwell here, and this is in some sort a second home to you?"

"Ay, truly. My father dwells in the next county—at Brianstone—a matter of some five-and-twenty miles from here; but he hath duties to the Queen's Majesty that oft-times take him thence for long months together, and at such times I come hither to be with my aunt, and to share the studies and employments of my cousins. My aunt, as you may well believe, albeit you have been in her presence but an hour, is a woman none can fail to reverence and love, and she is a notable housewife, too, and is a student to boot, and well instructed in many foreign tongues, and such learning as seldom falls to the lot of women. Thus it is that it is thought a great privilege to be under her care—a privilege that I do not share alone. For yonder laughing maiden with the coal-black hair and sparkling eyes is no Furnival, but, like myself, a motherless cousin, the only child of our uncle Gammage, an esquire of Glamorganshire in Wales, who in the wild and lawless state of

his country, and the difficulty of gaining instruction for his daughter, hath been glad to leave her since her infancy with our good aunt, who hath ever been to her as a mother."

"And yon beauteous maiden with the golden locks and eyes like a forest deer, what may her name be? Is she a sister of thine own?"

Honora laughed softly at the implied compliment, but shook her head as she replied,—

"Nay, my lord, no daughter of the house of Rogers ever boasted so fair a face or such high-bred grace as is displayed by our gentle Lady Alianora de Frene;" and as the name passed her lips the young lord looked quickly up, as if he recognized the name.

"Lady Alianora de Frene," he repeated; "then surely she is the daughter of the Earl of Courtland, and sister to the Viscount Lisle, who is in such favour with the Queen's Majesty. I thought there was something familiar to me in the turn of the head and the brilliant softness of those wondrous eyes. Her brother hath just the same—albeit a very proper knight, second to none in tilt-yard or tourney. And much I marvel that the Earl should have kept so fair a daughter away from his side, when she might have graced the Court as one of its brightest beauties."

"The Earl hath not seen Alianora this three years or more. Perchance you know that his noble castle lies not five miles from hence. Ten years agone, when Alianora was bare ten years old herself, the sweet lady countess died, and died in the arms of my good aunt, who had ever been ranked by her as a true friend; and ere she died she

implored her motherly care and good offices for the little Alianora, who was like a frail butterfly, that a blast of wind may blow away. The Earl, who truly loved her, promised to leave the little maiden to my aunt's care, and the mother died happy in this assurance. When she was laid in the grave, the Earl shut up his house and betook himself, after a brief residence in foreign parts, to Court, whither he hath remained ever since, only paying brief visits at long intervals to his estate and his daughter. Of late, in the letters that from time to time are sent her, he hath bidden Alianora prepare herself for a summons that cannot be very long delayed now; but she always prays for a respite, dreading naught in the world so much as being torn from the sheltering wing of my good aunt, and launched upon the troubled sea of Court life, which methinks is ill-suited to one of her tastes and feeling. But I fear I weary you with my idle words. Perchance you might sleep an I were to leave your side."

"I prithee think not so. I would fain hear more of such talk. To one like my ill-starred self, who hath never known a home that is meet to be called by such a sweet name, nor yet a mother's love, there is a strange rest and contentment in hearing such tales as these, and seeing what happier lives are like. I would my own lot had been cast in some such home as this."

Honora's eyes were fixed upon his face full of unspoken sympathy. Words trembled on her lips that she did not venture to utter; but she could not forbear to ask one question,—

"Your father, my lord? he yet lives. Have you no home with him?"

"My father has wedded himself anew to my Lady Frances Howard, and she mislikes me, and would fain shut the doors in my face. At Court I dare not show myself, for reasons you may well guess. For three years and more have I remained at Oxford, studying classic lore and such things as a man should know; and having completed my studies there, yet knowing not whither to turn my steps I took my journey to Plymouth, whither I heard Mr. Bertie had landed, after having been in foreign parts on business of his own. I joined him, knowing that in him I should find a friend who would not look coldly upon me for no reason save that the Queen's Majesty mislikes every unfortunate who has the blood of the Greys running in his veins. I would fain become one of his gentlemen-at-arms; but as to that he hath given me no answer yet. When he takes upon himself his new rank and dignity, mayhap he will grant my request."

"And what may that new rank be?" questioned Honora, with a quick glance at the spare soldier, who sat at the board in deep converse with his host—converse to which the eldest son, Humphrey Furnival, was listening with close attention.

"Nay, know you not that Mr. Bertie hath claimed and received the barony to which his mother was sole heiress? He hath come to England on this same business, and will shortly be summoned to Parliament as my Lord Willoughby. Have you never heard the story of the Baroness Willoughby,

his mother, Duchess of Suffolk by her first marriage, and the wife of her equerry, Mr. Bertie, by her second?"

Honora shook her head. She had heard of the death of the Dowager-Duchess Katherine of Suffolk (as she was called to distinguish her from the other contemporaneous Dowager-Duchess Frances) the previous autumn, but had paid little heed to the news. Now she was eager to hear all her companion could tell.

"The late Duchess of Suffolk was by birth Baroness Willoughby of Eresby, succeeding her father, who had no son to carry on the title in the male line. She was brought up a stanch Protestant, and being a woman of a ready wit and high spirit, had spoken her mind as to the conduct of several Romish priests and dignitaries, and had betrayed such abhorrence of Gardner as had drawn upon herself the bitter animosity of that haughty prelate. This was during the reign of his late Majesty King Edward the Sixth, when she was the fourth wife of Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk. Before his majesty's death she had been left a widow, and had married one of her gentleman attendants, Mr. Bertie; but finding on Queen Mary's accession that Gardner had his eye upon her, and intended to make her answer for her faith, she fled the country with her husband, and found her way to Flanders. They were in such sore plight from this sudden flight, and from the fact that the Bishop of Arras had heard of their arrival at Cleves, and had chased them out of the town, that they had to wander about for a time almost like beggars; and Peregrine, soon to be Lord Willoughby, gained his name from

the fact that he was born in a church porch on a wild and wet winter's night, his parents finding themselves unable to gain any other shelter. After many vicissitudes, more fitted for the pages of a romance than my halting speech, the King of Poland invited them to his land, and gave them a fair demesne there, where they lived in comfort, till the accession of our gracious majesty enabled them to return to this country. At the age of twenty, Peregrine won in marriage the hand of Lady Mary de Vere, sister to the Earl of Oxford, and has many fair children at home. His wife remained during his absences from the country with his mother, the witty and kind-hearted duchess, whom I shall ever remember with gratitude for her kindness to me when I have been to her house, as well as for the hospitable shelter she bestowed upon my poor aunt, the Lady Mary Grey, who, when separated by the Queen from her husband after her imprudent private marriage, was sent to be for some years a resident beneath the roof of the Dowager-Duchess Katherine of Suffolk, where I as a child have seen her. Lady Mary Bertie is as sweet a lady as ever breathed, and I would fain take service with her husband, that I might be with those who look not with cold suspicion on me. The duchess died last October, and her son is shortly to be formally called to the rank of Baron Willoughby of Eresby, which is his right through his mother, and, albeit Court life is little to his liking, he hath come over on this business, and will remain to take his seat in parliament when it hath been concluded."

Honora listened to this long story with great interest,

looking with more of attention and curiosity at the bronzed soldier, who was conversing upon the vexed question of the Queen's marriage with the Duke of Alençon, now all the talk in the courts of England and France. The marriage of a woman approaching fifty with a man little more than half that age has in it something revolting to the mind; but there were many who for reasons of state and policy advocated it, on the ground that sovereigns must hold the good of the State higher than personal predilection. But it did not appear as though Mr. Bertie held this view. He spoke with something of sternness in his tones; nor did he mince his words in courtier fashion. In his checkered life it seemed as if he had merged the courtier in the soldier, and this characteristic clung to him throughout his career.

"I would have no dealings, an I were in the Queen's counsels, with any member of that treacherous house of Valois. I have been at the French court; I have seen somewhat of the dealings and the treachery of that modern Jezebel, Catherine de Medicis, the Queen Mother, as she is called. Ay, sir, I was in the house of our Ambassador, Walsingham, that black night, not yet ten years past, when that wicked woman, in despite, I always maintain, of the will of her feeble son, the late King Charles, caused the hideous massacre to be prosecuted, at thought of which I shudder yet to think. And it is this woman who hath had the rearing of her sons—the wretched Charles, who hath passed to his account; the present monarch, who as Duke of Anjou paid court to her majesty, and seemed like at one

time to win her hand; and this brown-faced, bandy-legged Alençon, who also now claims to be called Anjou, and whom our Queen, despite his ugliness, professes to like above all other suitors, dubbing him her 'Frog-Prince' and I know not what other foolish names beside. Yet he hath been bred up in a nest of popery; he hath lived his life in the midst of foul intrigue; he comes of that worn-out house of Valois, which seems like to die out from its very wickedness and debauchery. And, albeit just at this present juncture, hatred and jealousy of the Guises hath led the Queen Mother to look with friendly eyes on England and England's religion, what trust can there be in the fair seeming of such a woman? It is well known that in hypocrisy and double dealing her sons emulate her, and that she sways them even as one of a powerful mind always will sway those that are weak and feeble."

"Ay, truly," answered Mr. Furnival, "our English blood always boils in our veins at the thought of what was done in Paris that Eve of St. Bartholomew, and the French marriage is vastly unpopular with the people; yet I have heard it said by those who live near the centre of the state, that with Philip of Spain threatening us on one hand, and Scotland and its troubles and revolts at our very doors, to say nothing from the peril in our very midst from the captive Queen, it behoves us to find some foreign ally, and that it were folly to refuse the good-will of France, now that it is offered in present good faith."

"Ay, truly we do need an ally; but not (so say I at least) with that corrupt land of popery and vice. Nay,

why need we go thus far, when that noble Prince William of Orange is longing for our help in an alliance that would free his country from the hated Spanish yoke, and then with England's aid sweep Spanish ships from the face of the earth, and carry war if need be to the very gates of Philip's palace? I tell you, good sir, that the strength and resources of the Provinces are utterly misunderstood in this country. We look at them as poor, crushed States, so exhausted by war that an alliance with them will but bring more trouble and cost to this land. But despite all that they have suffered, they are yet rising in wealth and strength daily. So long as they have a man left they will fight; and could her Majesty but resolve upon a bold and direct policy, and cast in her lot with the Prince, soon would she find, what no man yet believes, that these two nations together could hold the seas and keep Spain at bay; ay, and dictate terms to that haughty potentate who in his cabinet at Madrid is watching our policy with secret satisfaction, plotting through his spies at Westminster to hinder the one alliance which would bring honour and glory to this land, and confusion and destruction to his most cherished schemes."

"I verily believe this nation would rejoice to hear of any course being taken that would stop the French marriage and give liberty to our ships to revenge the sufferings of the English sailors who have been seized, as so many have been, by the officers of the Inquisition in Spanish ports. But again, there are yet too many Catholics in the country for a war against a Catholic

power to be greatly liked. Yet for my own part I would fain join hands with the Prince of Orange, who alone of all princes seems just and upright, and beyond all reproach a true patriot. Said you not that you had but lately come from him?"

"Ay, on a private errand of mine own, to gratify my wish to see so good and great a man, and to learn from his lips the state of the country, that I may report upon it to my good friend Mr. Secretary Walsingham, who, betwixt the Queen's humours and her changes of purpose, hath but an evil time in these troublous days. But I may not weary you longer with such matters; and methinks my young comrade there looks fitter for his couch than any other place beside. I thank you heartily for the kindly hospitality extended to us, and if it please you we will now retire, that we may be the better fitted, by a sound night's rest, for our journey on the morrow."

But there arose a sort of murmur of dissent at those words from more than one person in the hall, and the master of the house gave voice to the general sentiment.

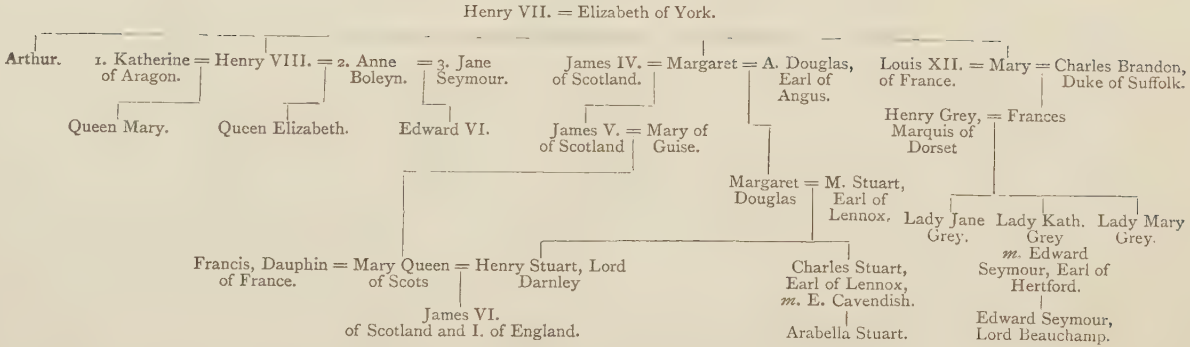
"Prithee, good sir, be not in such haste to depart. Yon lad, as my wife truly saith, will not be fit for the saddle by the morrow; and as the day following is the Sabbath, will you not be entreated, and remain with us till Monday comes? My son Ivo tells me that your horses are wearied and jaded by long travel over our bad roads, and one of them hath a chafed shoulder that needs ease from the saddle. If your business be not such as brooks no delay, you will be doing us a pleasure by remaining for a season

here. There is much I would gladly learn from you, and travellers come not our way as often as we would. I pray you be entreated."

The soldier glanced at his young companion, and saw plainly that the words of his host were true, at least so far as the lad was concerned; and although anxious to rejoin his wife, from whom he had been parted some months, he was not in pressing haste, and was willing to accept the hospitality so cordially offered. So after arranging to despatch one of his troopers on the morrow with a letter to Lady Mary, he thanked good Mr. Furnival for his hospitable offer, and consented to remain for a day or two, until his comrade was able to bear the fatigues of travel.

With many expressions of satisfaction this decision was received, and then the sons of the house conducted the guests up the wide oak staircase to the rush-strewn guest-chambers, where upon the open hearths log-fires were blazing. And if the rooms would look bare and mean according to our modern luxurious ideas, at least they contained every requisite of that period, and the clean beds with their fair linen sheets and tapestry hangings—the work of the mistress and her daughters—seemed to invite the weary travellers to repose; and as they closed the door upon their kind hosts, they congratulated themselves upon the chance that had led them to take refuge within the hospitable portals of Wyndgate Manor.

HOUSE OF TUDOR.*


Henry VII. = Elizabeth of York.
Arthur.
1. Katherine of Aragon. = Henry VIII. = 2. Anne Boleyn. = 3. Jane Seymour.
James IV. of Scotland. = Margaret = A. Douglas, Earl of Angus.
Louis XII. of France. = Mary = Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk.
Queen Mary.
Queen Elizabeth.
Edward VI.
James V. of Scotland = Mary of Guise.
Henry Grey, Marquis of Dorset = Frances
Margaret Douglas = M. Stuart, Earl of Lennox.
Lady Jane Grey.
Lady Kath. Grey m. Edward Seymour, Earl of Hertford.
Lady Mary Grey.
Francis, Dauphin of France. = Mary Queen of Scots = Henry Stuart, Lord Darnley
James VI. of Scotland and I. of England.
Charles Stuart, Earl of Lennox, m. E. Cavendish.
Arabella Stuart.
Edward Seymour, Lord Beauchamp.

* Some irrelevant names have been omitted from this table.

Note.—The accompanying table will explain to young readers the position of Lord Beauchamp in the royal house. Strangely enough, in those days the people looked upon the will of King Henry VIII. as the instrument which should settle the succession, unless the Queen should settle it herself—a thing she always tried to avoid doing. The will of that monarch passed entirely over the House of Stuart, as represented by the issue of his elder sister Margaret, and entailed the crown (failing his own children or their heirs) upon the offspring of the younger sister Mary. Thus it was that Lady Jane Grey was raised for a few days to the throne (on the alleged illegitimacy of Mary and Elizabeth), and that on her death her sister, Lady Katherine, and afterwards Katherine's son, Lord Beauchamp, were regarded by a small party in the state as being next in succession. The Queen imprisoned Lady Katherine Grey on hearing of her private and imprudent marriage; tried to throw doubt on its legality, and never admitted the legitimacy of Lord Beauchamp. But it was perfectly well known that the marriage had been a true one, and in James the First's reign the fact was fully established by the declaration of the priest who had performed the ceremony, but who had been afraid to come forward before.

CHAPTER II.

A SUMMONS FROM THE QUEEN.

THE morning following upon the eventful evening just described dawned fair and clear and cold. But the crisp freshness of the air was invigorating to the young and active; and if the customs of those times sent folks earlier to their beds in an evening, it certainly made them stir abroad very much earlier in the morning than we do now.

The sun had not very long risen, and the east was still one rosy flush of tender brightness, when the Lady Alianora de Frene quitted the house by a little side-door, and glided along a narrow pathway through the dewy meadow to a certain spot where the roar of falling water denoted the presence of mill or weir. Indeed, the weir and mill pools stood almost side by side, divided only by a narrow neck of land, and when the mill was not working, as at this hour to-day, the water foamed over a miniature cascade, and fell into the weir-pool in sheets of snow-white foam.

It was a sweet, lonely spot, greatly beloved by the Earl's daughter, and one of her favourite resorts. Rare water-plants grew beside the pool, and in summer lilies floated calmly upon its shining face. The trees clustered thickly

round it, shutting it off in a peaceful seclusion; and save for the proximity of the mill, it might have been far away from human habitation. No one ever disturbed her in this solitude. If the men were at work in the mill, it was little she heard or saw of them, and the noise of the falling water seemed to isolate her from all but her own thoughts. It was a retreat shared sometimes with others; but this fact only served to make it the more dear to her. Some of the happiest hours of her life had been spent by Alianora beside this picturesque pool.

There was a wonderful beauty in this girl's thoughtful, dreamy face. The features were delicately cut, and cast in the high-bred mould of the De Frenes. The colour came and went in the fair cheek with every wave of passing emotion, and the golden hair was so heavy and abundant that it seemed almost to weigh down the small head and slender white neck. Perhaps the little droop of the head was a habit induced by constant dreamy reverie; but it was one of Alianora's characteristics, and helped to add to the pensive and almost ethereal impression always produced by her upon strangers. She had the air of being a thing somewhat apart—a creature of spiritual rather than of concrete existence; her fragile frame and lonely habits alike contributing to increase this impression in the minds of those about her. Her rank and her early delicacy of health had alike helped to exempt her from the household tasks and common duties that fell naturally to the other girls in the house; and when they were busy in kitchen, still-room, or pantry, she would be dreaming over the pages of some old-

world poem or romance; and when their spinning-wheels were making a merry humming round the hearth in winter evenings, her delicate embroidery would lie forgotten upon her knee, whilst the great, deep, stag-like eyes would be gazing into the depths of the blazing logs, as if in the dancing play of the flame she could see strange visions denied to all beside.

She had hardly heard a sharp or chiding word addressed to her all the years she had dwelt beneath the roof of honest Mr. Furnival. It was not that either he or his wife stood in awe of her superior rank; indeed she had so grown into their hearts that they found it hard to remember she was not their own child. And those were the days of severe domestic discipline, when children stood in presence of their parents, seldom spoke unless spoken to first, and received a sharp rap as a matter of course as a reminder of any small breach of respect. Punishment for disobedience or idleness was meted out in hard measure in most houses, and grown-up sons and daughters were often shut up and fed on prisoner's diet for offences that would be thought little enough of in these more easy-going days. The fact that such punishments were unknown in the Furnival household, and that harsh words and blows did not belong to its code, was rather due to the extraordinary power possessed over the hearts of those about her by Mrs. Furnival, than to any feeling of repugnance to the prevailing habits of the time. The firm, wise guidance of the father, and the loving, watchful care of the mother, and perhaps the very fact that there were others not of the

same blood constantly beneath the home roof, combined to produce a harmony and community of interest amongst them all which resulted in a greater peace and concord than is always to be found in a large household. Love and mutual respect and assistance was the rule of the house; and although to Alianora, in right of her birth, certain privileges and exemptions were tacitly accorded, no jealousy was excited in the minds of the other maidens. Indeed they all rather combined to spoil and wait on her, feeling that whatever happiness might be hers in the present, there were trials in store for her in the future greater than any that were likely to come in their way. Her father was known as a cold-hearted, ambitious man, who would play the part of tyrant without a qualm if he once saw that it would be to his advantage to coerce his daughter into a splendid marriage. Alianora's beauty, when once it became known to him, would be almost certain to tempt him to sell her into gilded slavery (such at least was the secret impression of more than one member of the family); and the day could not now be long delayed when he would discover the fact that his daughter had developed into a maiden of strange and at times almost dazzling loveliness, and with that peculiar charm in her beauty which is best described by the word "mystic."

And what would Alianora say or do if such a course were to be pursued towards her? That was a question few liked to ask themselves, and none felt able to answer. Yet there were some watchful eyes among those about her which had made shrewd observations with regard to the maid,

and their owners knew that it would be doubly hard for her to be given over to the shackles of a loveless wedlock.

Alianora had come out to-day to think over some words she had heard spoken the previous evening—words that had troubled her and given her many hours of wakefulness in the night that had just passed. Possibly there might have been another reason why she thus early left her couch—a magnet that drew her steps through the dewy grass to the secluded pool; but be that as it might, she had not been many minutes there alone before she heard a voice beside her, a voice that did not seem to startle her, albeit she had heard no approaching footfall through the roar of the water; and turning quickly, whilst a wonderful smile illuminated her face, she put out her hand and said,—

"Humphrey."

The young man had plainly been fishing, and that not unsuccessfully, as his basket of trout testified; but he had given that and his tackle to Gilbert to carry to the house, and he and Alianora were alone together beside the sparkling pool.

That it was not the first time they had thus met was plain from the small surprise she evinced at seeing him there; but after the light of welcome had faded from her face, the old look as of anxiety and pain returned, and she glanced wistfully up at him.

"Humphrey," she said, in clear, low tones, that he heard above the rushing of the falling waters, "methinks you have come hither to tell me something—something that I read in your eyes last evening, and that I have dreamed of

with terror all this night. Why must it be, Humphrey? —why must it be?"

"My life, I have told thee long ere this that if I am ever to call thee mine, I must make myself a name other than that of a country esquire's son. The Earl of Courtland's daughter can raise her eyes high. And thinkest thou, my heart's beloved, that I would have it said I had drawn thee down to poverty and obscurity, when thou mightest have been a bright star in another world than ours?"

But Alianora stood upright beside him, her eyes alight, her whole face glowing with the passion of a first love, which had grown up between those two, all unknown and unsuspected, from their childhood, but which of late had been confessed between them, although in secrecy, and all unguessed save by one or two.

"And thinkest thou that I care what the noisy world may say when I have thee by my side to love me? Humphrey, didst thou but know with what dread I look upon that seething whirlpool men call the world, thou wouldest not speak thus slightingly of the peaceful obscurity in which I fain would pass my life. What have I in common with that great, terrible, intriguing world of Court and fashion of which we heard but a little last night, and that enough to make me shudder at the thought of being summoned thither? Ah, Humphrey, mine own heart's love—for thus I will call thee this once—I implore thee not to leave me. Hast not thou heard it said of me that I can read the future—that those of my line, whose lonely ways I have

inherited, have had strange gifts of prevision as to what may betide in days to come? I know not with what truth men say these things; but I do know that it is with terrible dread and misgiving that I think of thy departure in quest of wealth and fame. I dream fearful dreams, and see waking visions of equal horror. Humphrey, why must it be? Thy father and mother love me; they have been the dearest, kindest parents to me. I trow well they would welcome me as a daughter in very truth. Ah, why canst thou not be content without that terrible hunt after fame and glory which I know, I feel, will but lead to misery and despair?"

She spoke with strange earnestness, almost as one who has read the secrets of the future, and the large dark eyes were full of strained entreaty. Humphrey had seldom felt a greater longing to throw prudence—honour almost—to the winds, and bind her fast to him without farther ado, than he felt at this moment; but with a great effort he held in check these wild impulses, and contented himself with taking the little hands reverently and gently in his own.

He was indeed a lover of whom any maiden might well be proud. A fine, stalwart man of three-and-twenty, standing six feet three in his stockings, as the saying is, with a firmly-knit, supple frame not yet come to its full development, yet deep-chested, broad-shouldered, and muscular far beyond the average, showing by the free, self-controlled movements, and alert, erect carriage, an agility that was equal to its physical strength. The face was in

harmony with the frame—fine, open, and full of unconscious command, rather square in its outlines, but gaining therefrom a resolution and strength that gave confidence and inspired respect. The hair was fair, and cut short after the manly fashion of the days, and the blue-gray eyes were set rather deep beneath the overhanging brows of the wide, square forehead. If not exactly a very handsome man, Humphrey Furnival would certainly not be overlooked in any company, and the training he had received, both military and naval, at different times in his life, had combined to give him ease of bearing and readiness of speech and action not always to be found in men of his type. He was ready now with an answer to his betrothed (if such she might be called, seeing that the pledge at present was only that of mutually avowed attachment), and tender as were his voice and his look, she read his unalterable decision in them both.

"Sweetheart," he said, lifting the little hands he held for one moment to his lips, "I need not tell thee how it hurts me to give thee pain; but if thou dost not yet understand thine own position and mine, I must explain it to thee clearly. Thou art the only daughter of a powerful and wealthy nobleman, one who has the right to look high in the marriages of his children. I am but a country gentleman's son; and were I now to present myself before him and sue him for this little hand, I trow he would not only say me nay, but would taunt me with having abused the confidence reposed in me and mine, by taking advantage of thine ignorance ere thou hadst seen the world or reached

years of discretion. And he might say no more than the truth in thus upbraiding me. Methinks mine own good parents would be ill-pleased did they learn that I had spoken words of love to thee, my heart's treasure. And yet they came, I know not how, and I cannot wish them unsaid. Yet because I love thee so well, I would fain make myself worthy of thee in the eyes of thy father and of the world. Listen, sweet lady, and upbraid me not with thine eyes. These are stirring days, when men can win fame and glory and treasure untold by following the fortunes of some of our bold sea-rovers, and diverting into English ports those streams of gold that are pouring into Spanish coffers from that strange new world beyond the setting sun. Alianora, thou knowest that as a youth I made one voyage with our sailor uncle, Furnival, and how we brought home treasure which has made us far richer than in days of yore. But for the fever he brought home and died of, he might have been amongst those who sailed with Francis Drake, and you see what he hath done. You heard last evening the story of his capture of that vast treasure, and how he brought it home in triumph last November; how the Queen hath received him, and will give him knighthood for his prowess? What one man hath done another can do. Our guest knows him, and he says that he will shortly put to sea again. Why, when he goes, should I not sail with him? On land there is naught to do; men talk of war, but war comes not nigh us, and I thirst to be up and doing. If I am to take thy hand and ask it from thy father, I must come in other guise than that of a

country lad, with nothing to call his own save his good sword and his good name. Dost thou not understand yet, my sweet? I trow if thou wert to see thy father, thou wouldest understand all too well."

If she did not understand entirely, at least she did in part, and the resistance died out of her face, to be replaced by a pathetic sadness.

"And thou wilt go away, Humphrey?"

"Ay, marry, that I must; yet it will but bring our meeting the nearer, sweetheart—the meeting when I may approach thee without fear of a rebuff."

"Art going soon?"

"Ay, truly, methinks so. I love not partings and days of farewell. It seemeth good to me to get my father's blessing, and take advantage of the escort of our guest to travel with him to London. He would, I doubt not, obtain speech for me of Mr. Drake or one of his company, and thus I might quickly gain that which I seek, and go forth with him when next he sails."

It was quick work, and Alianora winced; but the lovers could not linger longer there, for the hour of the household breakfast was nearing, and with a heavy heart she turned towards the house. As for Humphrey, his reluctance at leaving his home and his beloved was much tempered by a young man's natural delight at the prospect of going out into the world, upon one of those quests for fame and glory for which the sons of England have ever been famous, and never more so than at this period. True there were those who said that so long as war with Spain

had not been declared, and Philip maintained cordial diplomatic terms with Elizabeth, such exploits as those recently performed by Drake were rather those of a pirate than of a hero, and at headquarters both Burghley and Walsingham were insistent that the treasure should be returned.

But the feeling of the nation was not to be bound by laws. Instinctive hatred to Spain seemed born and bred in England's sons. The horrors of the Inquisition, of Alva's sojourn in the Low Countries, of cruelties practised upon English sailors in Spanish ports, were ringing through the land, and stirring up that kind of fierce antagonism to the Spanish nation that was destined to bear such glorious fruit but a few short years later. To meet the Spaniards upon the high seas, and snatch from them the treasure that they had wrung from the Indians of Mexico and Peru, seemed a right and glorious thing to do. There were those who, even in those days, shrewdly suspected that the Most Catholic King would fain have seen England's power laid in the dust, had not fear of cementing an alliance between her and France against himself kept him quiet and friendly. And those who suspected these feelings were wont to say that the treasure of the Indies would one of these days be expended in some gigantic enterprise against the unprotected shores of England. There was thus a double satisfaction in robbing the Spaniard of his gold; and there were few loyal hearts that did not beat high at the thought of proving England's supremacy upon the sea, and showing to the greatest nation upon the earth how little English sailors dreaded its power.

The Queen might not give open encouragement to such achievements, but it was well known that she winked at them in secret. Cautious and subtle in her dealings with her crafty and powerful neighbour, and by nature prone to crooked ways herself, it mattered little what she professed to King Philip of regret at the over-boldness of her sailor subjects. Those who knew her best knew well that she triumphed in secret over their prowess, and that a sea-rover returning home with plunder to lay at her feet was certain of a gracious reception at her Majesty's hands, and might hope for the honour of knighthood did his person please her, and were her mood to be favourable and gay.

So Humphrey's looks had long been turned seawards, and that with the sanction of his parents, who had given him leave to please his fancy in the matter, seeing little chance of promotion for him at home in these days of peace, and being themselves fired with some sort of ambition for the stalwart youth, their first-born, who seemed formed by nature to command and to conquer.

Breakfast was served in the great hall, as the evening supper had been. Tea and coffee there were none, but bowls of milk and of whey for the women and girls, and of ale and mead for the men, supplied the place of more modern beverages, and the board was liberally laden with various kinds of meat, venison pasty being the chief delicacy to be found there. Manchets of wheaten bread were the favourite bread in the upper classes, though the commoner chete-bread and ravelled-bread still appeared, and were preferred by some of the party. Excellent butter and

cheese were always to be found in every country house that boasted a dairy, and Mrs. Furnival was noted for hers. Trenchers were still used in houses where silver plate had not found its way, and forks were unknown till many years later; but the fingers of the left hand did dexterous duty, and slices of bread crust were also used extensively to make up for a deficiency that was just beginning to be felt.

The guest of the previous evening was already at the board when the truants appeared; but there was no sign of the youth, and Mr. Bertie was making excuse for him to the hostess.

"He hath passed but a troubled night. I fear he hath some sort of fever coming on—it will follow a great effusion of blood sometimes—and he is so weak he can scarce lift his head this morning. I fear you will repent your kind hospitality, which hath brought such a charge upon you. But by my troth I never thought to see the lad in so sore a case for a trifling flesh-wound that we soldiers laugh at. He blushed with shame himself at being in such a case; but he cannot make shift to dress himself, though he was making gallant effort to do so, till I bade him desist and lay himself down again. If there be leech or barber within reach of this place, I would fain fetch him to see the boy; and if we can get him moved to Romsey or Winchester, I can gain tendance for him there till his wound be cured."

Mr. Furnival laughed in his bluff, hearty fashion.

"You will get no tendance for him—nay, not in the

Queen's palace itself—that will better what the lad will have here under the hands of my wife and little Mistress Honora Rogers there, who hath an apt gift at tending the sick, and hath been a pupil these many years of her good aunt. Why trouble the lad by moving him?"

"And with a fever on him besides the wound? Fie, sir! what mean you by such talk? Would you kill the poor youth outright?"

Mrs. Furnival spoke with a smile, and Bertie laughed.

"Nay, gracious madam, I had no such wish in my thoughts. But how was I to know that my young friend had fallen into the hands of such a good Samaritan? I wot had I brought him in such a plight to Elvetham, his father's seat, his step-mother, my Lady Frances, would have been for sending him elsewhere sooner than have the trouble of tending him; but—"

"But there is no Lady Frances here. We are plain folks with plain ways, and when chance throws a sick lad in our way, we keep him safe until he be whole again. So no more of moving him, an it please you, good sir. If Protestant England have swept away the monasteries and religious houses, at least she can show that the strangers and the sick and the suffering can be tended and cared for elsewhere."

The gentle dignity of the tone was answered by a bow from Bertie, and a murmured word of approval from the master of the house, and in a few moments Mrs. Furnival rose, and bidding Honora follow her with certain medicaments, she went up to the room where Lord Beauchamp

was lying. Her experienced eye told her at once that he was very ill, and that the wound was not the only cause of indisposition. The loss of blood and consequent exhaustion might have done much to aggravate the symptoms, but that there was fever in some form could not be doubted, and he was hardly able to rouse himself from his lassitude to murmur a few words of apology and thanks.

When Honora appeared and assisted in dressing the wound, which had inflamed and bore rather an ugly look, his eyes followed her about with an instinctive pleasure and satisfaction. Honora had been always her aunt's assistant in the doctoring of the poorer people round, who came to her as a matter of course to be treated for their injuries or complaints. The girl had a natural aptitude for such offices, and was as skilful and light-handed as Mrs. Furnival herself. A hind from the fields would have received just the same care as this young nobleman; nevertheless Honora stole a look sometimes at the colourless face on the pillow, thinking with a sort of romantic pleasure of the history and destiny of their unbidden guest, and feeling that there was something more interesting in ministering to the needs of a nephew of Lady Jane Grey than in performing like offices for the rustic clowns.

Once their eyes met, and Beauchamp tried to rouse himself to express his sense of obligation to his fair nurse, and though his words were few and halting, yet they brought a smile and a blush to Honora's face.

"We are glad to serve all those who need our help," she answered, "and my aunt will soon cure you of your hurt.

She bade me give you this posset to drink. It is of her own mixing, and you will sleep if you could but swallow it. Let me raise your head—so. Now will you not try?"

Beauchamp had refused all else pressed upon him, but how could he refuse what was offered thus? He drank and drank again, Honora not permitting him to lie down again till he had drained the last drop. Obedience to authority was an unquestioned rule in that house; and had not her aunt, when hastily summoned away by a call from below but a few minutes ago, bidden her get the patient to drink the posset before she left him?

When it was swallowed she still lingered, putting the room in order with those small, skilful touches characteristic of woman's handiwork; and though at first she had been aware that her movements were followed by those lustrous hazel eyes, yet gradually, as the mixture took effect, the lids slowly closed, the long, dark lashes rested immovable on the white cheek, and Honora knew that the much-needed sleep had come to her patient.

With one more glance at him—a glance not devoid of admiration and interest—the girl slipped away to tell her aunt that all was going on well in the sick-room; but the moment she reached the gallery overlooking the large hall below, she became aware of an unusual tumult and excitement going on there.

The great door stood open, as it commonly did in all but the coldest weather, and it seemed as if some recent arrival had taken place; for at the lower end of the table, just visible over the screen where Honora stood, sat

a servant in the livery of the Earl of Courtland, discussing a plate of savoury viands with the sharp-set appetite of a man who has ridden hard and far. And another glance around told the girl that he must have come with tidings of some moment, for the despatches he had plainly brought were being eagerly read by the master and mistress of the house, who stood together beside the glowing hearth with the paper between them; Alianora, who had evidently received another shorter missive, stood clinging to Ursula, with a strange look of repulsion and dread upon her face; whilst Ursula was reading the letter, and holding Alianora fast with her arm.

Farther away, and near to the door, Humphrey and Mr. Bertie were deep in talk—talk that was eagerly listened to by the other brothers, Ivo and Gilbert. But just at this moment Humphrey's attention seemed to be wandering, and his eyes were bent earnestly upon Alianora's face—bent upon it with a look that would have told the quick-witted and sympathetic Honora a secret of its own, if she had not long ago found it out for herself.

Barbara and Bess were at their spinning-wheels, but their work was only a pretence. They were all alive to hear the news which had set the household in such a stir, and as soon as they saw Honora in the gallery above, they slipped silently away to join her in that coin of vantage, as eager to impart what they knew as she could be to hear it.

Barbara Gammage, Honora Rogers, and Bess Furnival were almost of an age, and having been brought up in

such sister-like fashion, were bound together in bonds of mutual affection and sympathy almost more warm and strong than is common amongst sisters. Barbara was a black-browed, black-eyed, gipsy-looking damsel, called by her uncle a "black Briton," and she was the leading spirit in all sports where mischievous daring had a share. Small made, but lithe and active as a kitten, she was the most reckless and excitable member of the family. Her fearless spirit and lively tongue not unfrequently brought her into trouble; but she had a way of scrambling out of a scrape, and of disarming displeasure by her archly coaxing ways, which helped to encourage her somewhat in the belief that she could do pretty much as she pleased. Her self-will, however, never took any very serious form, and she was the pet and plaything of the house.

Bess was much steadier, and had more of her mother's housewifely talents than any of the five girls brought up under her care. She had less good looks than the rest; but her honest, comely face was sufficiently pleasing, and the truthful openness of her expression was quite as attractive in its way as more regular beauty. If Ursula was the daughter to inherit her mother's commanding stature, stately grace, and calm dignity of feature, Bess was not disposed to grumble that her share had been the deftness of hand and quickness of eye which had made Mrs. Furnival a pattern housewife in the neighbourhood.

And as Ursula and Alianora had always held together, sharing the same room and loving each other with an intense and absorbing affection, so the younger ones had

made a little clan of their own which had won for them the title of "Inseparables," and they were never so happy as when gathered together in a corner by themselves, to watch and to listen to all that went by, free from observation and constraint.

"What is it that hath befallen?" asked Honora, as soon as her companions reached her; "there seemeth a fine coil going on below. Is not that my Lord of Courtland's livery? Hath he sent for our Alianora, as he hath threatened many a time to do?"

"Ay, verily, I believe so," answered Barbara. "I have heard naught but a word here and a word there; yet by the look on her face I cannot but think the dreaded summons hath come. See how she clings to Ursula as though she never would quit her hold; and look how her eyes shine like those of some timid deer taken in a snare! Another maiden in such case would weep and lament; but our Lady Alianora is never known to shed tears like us of commoner clay. Methinks she might almost melt away into thin air, and let the serving-man ride back with the news that she is not to be found. See! looks she not more like a wraith than a creature of flesh and blood?"

"Nay, jest not at her sorrow, Barbara," said Bess in compassionate accents. "It will be a sad trouble to her to be parted from the mother and from Ursula, and from the only home she hath known these last ten years; an it were me, I should be sore put about to think of leaving all behind and launching out in a new world. And she was ever the most timid of us all. Canst picture her at

Court, amongst all the grand dames there? She will look, methinks, like the sweet, shy wood-sorrel, with its drooping head, planted in a gay parterre of flaunting Dutch tulips, such as we saw last summer in the garden of Merchant Ridding. I pity her with all my heart!"

"And I, too," said Honora, with a look of sympathy and compassion; but Barbara tossed her black head and began again to speak.

"So do not I; and yet I would not say so altogether. Yes, I do pity *her*, for the reason that she loves neither her father nor the state to which she is born; and it might well grieve any one to leave this home and our sweet mother" (Barbara always spoke of her aunt so, having lived beneath her care from her infancy, and knowing no other mother). "And yet, once the plunge made into the great unknown world, and methinks I should find pleasure in the gay sights and strange sounds I should see and hear in London. I love this place right well, and yet I would fain think I might live to see somewhat else. What think you, maidens? an it were our lot to go to Court and become ladies-in-waiting to the Queen's royal Majesty, would you not find pleasure in such service? Would you not love to see the gay gallants ruffling there in velvet and silk and gold; and help to array our gracious lady in those wondrous robes and jewels of which report reaches even to us here? And should she wed this French Duke, as they say she talks of doing, and that right soon, would it not be a fine thing to see the royal pageants that they will set afoot to do honour to the nuptials? Ah, I would fain see

something of the gay world ere I grow too old for vanities and follies."

"Thou art not like to do that over quickly, methinks," answered Bess with sisterly frankness; and then the voices of the three dropped suddenly, for Mr. Furnival, taking the paper in his hands, turned towards Mr. Bertie and spoke aloud,—

"This despatch comes from our good friend and neighbour the Earl of Courtland, whose daughter hath long been a member of our household. Some of the news it contains will interest you. Will it please you to hear it read?"

"Ay, truly; all news from the Court is welcome. Speaks the Earl of this French marriage? In the Provinces it was greatly debated, and there were those who held that the Queen was much committed thereunto."

"Ay; and what think you of this, written by my Lord of Courtland, a very finished courtier, who spends his days continually amongst the Queen's gentlemen?—

"'Forasmuch as it hath pleased the Queen's Majesty to listen to the requests of her humble servants, and advance the peace and prosperity of the realm by uniting herself in wedlock with his grace the Duke of Alençon and Anjou, she hath desired that ambassadors be sent from France, and that quickly, to arrange with her Council the terms of the marriage treaty; and that the more honour be done them at their coming, it hath pleased her to summon us of her nobility about her, and desire us to add to the beauty and the splendour of her Court by bringing thither our daughters

and such others appertaining to us as will add lustre to that place of which she is the sun and soul.'

"The rest is but private mandates to us for the safe conveyance of the Lady Alianora to the Court; but what think you of that news? Will her Majesty prove in earnest at last? We have heard so much of alliances for her that we have all but ceased to give credence to reports like this. Hath she changed her mind, or is she only playing the old game once again?"

But Mr. Bertie shook his head.

"Nay, ask me not. The Queen's humours puzzle wiser heads than mine; methinks sometimes she knows not her own pleasure. State-craft is an art beyond the ken of a simple soldier. But if yon maiden hath to travel speedily to London, may I not offer my humble self and my trusty servants as part of her escort? Time presseth not so sorely but that I may stay for that; and there is the greater safety in numbers, the more so when fair ladies and their mails are in the company."

A look of relief and gratitude crossed Mr. Furnival's face. In those days a journey to London was something of an undertaking, and the protection of an experienced traveller, familiar with the roads, was a thing not to be despised.

"I thank you gratefully for so good an offer, and gladly would I accept it, an it were not too great a hindrance to you. Her father's summons is urgent, and brooks no loitering. Her mails will be but few, as all her state robes and such like gear will be furnished her when she

reacheth London; for with us she hath been but the simple maid of a country home like ours. Her father bids her lose no time in speeding her; and methinks she must leave us on Wednesday morning next, that she may e'en reach her father's house in the city of Westminster before the week's end. Perchance your business will not let you tarry as long; yet I would fain have such good escort for the maid."

"My time shall be yours," answered Bertie, with soldier-like decision and courtesy. "My wife would be the first to bid me act a friendly part by those who have shown themselves friends in my own time of need. And the lad yonder will be none the worse for a longer rest ere he takes again to the saddle.—Fair lady, will you favour me thus far by accepting my poor services, and granting me the honour of handing you over in safety to the Earl your father?"

Alianora raised her eyes for a moment to the face of the soldier, and made a courtly reverence.

"I thank you, sir—I thank you heartily for your good offer, and hold myself fortunate to receive it. I trust you will not be let on the way by so troublesome a charge."

But the sadness in the girl's eyes could not escape the keen glance of the guest, and turning to Humphrey he said,—

"Methinks the gentle lady liketh not this summons."

"Nay, that she doth not," was the quick response. "How should she welcome a call that will take her away from the only home she hath known since her childhood,

and the one who hath been a mother to her? how brook to exchange her tender care for that of a father she scarce knows, and the fellowship of these maidens for that of grand Court dames who will laugh at her simplicity, and gibe, perchance, at her inexperience? My heart bleeds for her, thus cut adrift from all she holds dear. We have always known the day must come, and yet methinks I never knew how hard it would be."

Humphrey's eyes were full of pain, too; for he pictured Alianora amongst a crowd of gay Court gallants, all eager to pay homage to the beauty that in his eyes was so transcendent. But he could not speak of these thoughts to a stranger, and he strode quickly away to muse upon the turn affairs had taken and decide what his part should be.

CHAPTER III.

CHANGES AND FAREWELLS.

"URSULA, mine own Ursula, I know not how to bear it."

There were no tears in Alianora's eyes, but in the tones of her voice there was a sadness akin to despair, and the close, clinging clasp of her arms told an eloquent tale of its own.

Ursula, though but one year older than the Earl's daughter, felt towards the fragile, dreamy creature something of a motherly love and protection. From the day that Alianora had come amongst them, a little, frail, delicate child of ten, looking younger than sturdy Bess or active Barbara, Ursula had taken upon herself the office of comforter and guardian to the motherless little one; and so close was the bond which had grown up between them that the thought of separation was terrible to both. And in those days separation was a very different thing from what it is now, and there was the feeling on both sides that it might mean almost entire silence, and ignorance of each other's doings for a period of many years. Ursula realized better than Alianora how very different would be now their re-

spective lots in life—how the peer's daughter would enter upon a new sphere, and move in a different orbit; and her heart felt full to bursting with pity and with sorrow as she thought of the possible trials and perils awaiting the girl in her new life. Would not the first thought of her ambitious father's heart be to mate her with some scion of a noble house? And how would the gentle, trusting, timid Alianora be able to resist the pressure put upon her? Yet Ursula knew the story of the secret love acknowledged now between her and Humphrey. She had been their confidante, and had been unable but to rejoice in their happiness, albeit her clear judgment warned her that there would be troubles to come, though neither guessed how quickly the trouble was coming upon them.

"My sweet one, what can I say to comfort thee? Ah, my Alianora, it might have been happier for thee hadst thou never learned to love us so well."

"Nay, nay, say not so, say not so," cried the girl, with a sudden fire in her soft eyes. "Ah, Ursula, if I were never to see thee more I would not say that; for time cannot touch or change our love, and I shall know, though so far away, that thy heart is mine as mine is thine. I shall know that in our thoughts and in our prayers we are united and together. And oh, my Ursula, it is a blessed thought that the troubles of this life are not all we have to look forward to. The glorious day will come when we shall meet again—and where there will be no more partings to sever us."

Strange words from a maiden of but twenty summers—

a maiden with beauty, rank, and wealth, plentifully endowed with nature's best and highest gifts: and yet the words were felt by Ursula to be eminently characteristic; for in Alianora's nature there was a strain of deep devotionalism, and from childhood she had loved to muse on the invisible and spiritual, until there were moments when she seemed to have more communion with that unseen world around us than with those amongst whom she moved. There had been moments when this power of abstraction had been something of a source of pain to Ursula, but now she rejoiced in it, for she knew that it would be the world of dreams that would be the happy one for Alianora in the new life upon which she was about to enter so soon.

But human nature was strong, and the girl's heart yearned over those from whom she was to be taken away, and above all over one nearest and dearest, even where all were so dear.

"Ursula, how can I bear it? It is trouble upon trouble. Hath he spoken to thee? Hast thou seen Humphrey today? Knowest thou that he is going at last to do as he hath always longed to do—go out upon the seas, to win fame and glory there, that he may come back at last—"

"To ask thy hand in marriage, little one. Ay, I have heard of it. Ere he retired last night he came and told me that the words our guest had that evening spoken had put him afresh in mind of his old resolve. I wot our parents will bid him take his own way, albeit they know not the motive that urges him on."

"And why should they not know? Why should we not

go to them and ask their blessing on our betrothal, that we might feel, though so cruelly sundered, that we belonged the one to the other? You shake your head, Ursula; deem you it unmaidenly that I should speak thus? Nay, then I will be unmaidenly this once, for my love is such as I shame not to speak before all the world; and I would go with Humphrey now to the world's end, were we but man and wife, rather sharing every peril and hardship at his side than the gayest, fairest lot on earth without him. Why should he not wed me ere he goes? and then no man can put us asunder: I am his and he is mine whatever may betide."

Alianora's eyes glowed and flashed, and her pale cheek lighted up as if at some sudden illumination from within; and Ursula looked on and marvelled at the strong spirit that burned within the fragile frame, though she knew well these moods of Alianora's, and the depth of emotion which prompted them.

Yet she shook her head once again, and spoke with the calm decision and resolution which was so like her mother's.

"Nay, Alianora, it may not be, it must not be. Wert thou thus to act, thy father would say, and justly, that we had played the part of false friends in thus plighting a high-born, well-dowered maiden to a youth who hath naught save his trusty sword to call his own, and his fortune yet to carve in life. Our parents would be sore grieved to think that thus their honour might be called in question. They have never forgotten that you belong to a different world; and I trow they have never dreamed that we have our-

selves forgotten it—that we have forgotten all save that thou art our sweetest, dearest sister, and that to know thee is to love thee, ay, even as Humphrey hath learned to do. They would never heed thy prayers wert thou to speak to them as thou hast spoke to me. It would but make the parting harder for all, make them wroth, perchance, with Humphrey, and give a new sorrow to our mother's heart. Nay, let us keep our secret still. There is no guilt in it, and no shame, and yet it were better not openly bruited abroad. Let Humphrey go, and go in the hope that he may win thee yet, and thou wilt know that he is thine in all sooth as truly as if your hands had been joined by priest in wedlock. And yet—for thou art still young, sweet sister, and hast seen nothing of the world as yet—if when thou seest and knowest more, thou shouldest find that thou hast mistaken thy heart, and that Humphrey holdeth rather the brother's place than the lover's—"

"Nay, Ursula, I may not hear such words even from thee."

"Dearest, it is not that *I* think thus. I do but echo what the world would say, and I can see that it is best there should be no pledge save that of love, which none may hinder. For if thou knowest not thy heart yet, thou art free to change; and if through all thou art steadfast and true, then when Humphrey returns he will know that he need no longer hang back; for had thy heart been thine to give elsewhere, it would have been given long before."

Alianora's reply was a strange smile; but when it had passed, her face took its old look of anxiety.

"Thinkest thou then that he will be away a long while?"

"Nay, I know not, save that fortunes are not often made in a day or a year. But marvellous success attends some; and if boldness and high mettle meet their reward, our Humphrey should be second to none in the quest."

"And I shall hear no word of him all that weary, weary while?"

"Nay, but methinks thou mayest hear more than we can hope to do, an thou knowest the name of the vessel in which he sails, which he is sure to communicate to thee. Will not the Queen's Majesty receive tidings of every prize taken and every exploit performed? And wilt thou not hear the Court news, as we cannot hope to do so far away? Ah, does that thought bring back the smile I feared to see no more to-day? Believe me, sweet sister, I trow thou wilt know to the full as much of Humphrey there, as thou couldest do wert thou here with us. And thou wilt receive his last farewell; for he will sail from London, I doubt not, and it will fare strangely an he find not occasion to see thee ere he go. My lord can hardly deny access to one who cometh from our house to his."

"Thou talkest as though thou deemedst my father the hardest and proudest of men," said Alianora, a little pained; "but is not the best proof of his good-will the fact that he hath left me here so long? Why seemeth it to thee as if he would part us now entirely? I see nothing in this summons to bid me fear that."

"I do but judge by his letter. Speaketh he not of finding companions for thee suited to thy rank? And doth he

not bid thee return us thanks with all due courtesy for our long hospitality, as though he meant it for a last farewell, ere thou findest thyself in a world from which he will think thou wilt never wish to return? But I will not sadden thee with auguries. Mayhap we may meet again ere long. And whatever befalleth us, absent or present, we shall know that we have each the unchanging love of the other."

Ursula saw far more clearly than Alianora would permit herself to do how final this separation was likely to be. She had always heard Lord Courtland spoken of as a hard, ambitious man, and the wonder was that he had left his daughter with them so long. But natural affection was not an attribute of his, and perhaps he had thought she would prove an encumbrance to him. Yet having once seen her in all her beauty, and having severed the connection with the home of her childhood, he was not very likely, it seemed to Ursula, to sanction its renewal. He would desire to see his daughter make friends of those in her own rank, and the more she clung to the country squire's family, the less he would be likely to arrange for any farther communication. It was a sorrowful and bitter thought to Ursula, and the only ray of brightness was the possible success of Humphrey's suit. But even that seemed beset with dangers; and she greatly feared, whatever the final result might be, that their love would only prove in the present a source of pain, anxiety, and trouble.

Yet it was not for her to fill Alianora's troubled heart with her own forebodings, and she tried to put a brave

face on the future, in order to cheer her companion; but there was news in store for them of which they never dreamed—news more welcome than any they had looked to hear, and which brought once more the glow of happiness into Alianora's pale cheek.

They were yet in the chamber they shared together, whither Alianora had retired when she fully understood the purport of her father's summons, and they were sitting hand in hand upon the bed, trying to see sunshine behind the cloud, when the door opened softly and Mrs. Furnival came in.

Alianora started to her feet, and Ursula rose likewise, as children did in those days in presence of their parents; and the younger girl moved quickly forward with outstretched arms, her lips quivering to a sort of sob of, "Mother, mother!" by which name she, like the other girls not her own children, was wont at times to address the one whose motherly presence made the light of their home.

In a moment she was gathered into that warm embrace, in which she felt she would like to lie for ever, and it was some few minutes before aught was heard in the room save the fond and endearing words which were breathed over her in this moment of threatened parting,—words which were all the more precious for their rarity; for Mrs. Furnival was not a demonstrative woman, nor were those demonstrative days. Parent and child, the young and the old, were more reserved in outward appearances than they are now, and embraces were seldom given in daily life, a blessing being substituted for the morning and evening saluta-

tion; whilst soft, caressing words were seldom heard, as it was deemed a "cockering" of young folks to let them know themselves too much beloved.

"Mother—my mother—why must I leave thee?"

"Thou must e'en do thy father's bidding, my maiden, and give him loving reverence, albeit thou knowest him but little yet. Have we not always known this day must come? Have I not bidden thee prepare thy mind for it?"

"Ay, verily, madam, and so have I tried to do; and yet—and yet—"

"Content thee, child; I know what thou wouldest say. It is hard for us to lose thee—hard for thee to go; but I come not to add to thy grief by speaking my regrets, but rather to cheer thee by telling thee something that methinks will please thee well. Dost think that thou wilt go out from hence alone, save for the escort of thy father's servants and that of our guest, Mr. Bertie? Dost think we could send our nestling out into the great world with no better guard than that?"

Ursula looked up eagerly, and Alianora raised her eyes to the face that was now bent smilingly upon her. They both read good news in those kindly eyes; but neither girl interrupted by a comment or question, save what their eyes spoke mutely.

Mrs. Furnival seated herself on the side of the bed, and took Alianora's hand in hers; but her glance sought her daughter's face.

"I have come to speak thee anent this matter, my daughter. Thy father and I have been discussing it

betwixt ourselves, and we will leave the decision in thy hands. Say, my child, how would it please thee to pay that visit to thy good uncle West that he besought with so much friendly hospitality when he visited us four years come Martinmas? Hast ever thought of seeing London and its sights? And if thou art ever to go, can we look for a better opportunity than this one?—How now, maidens? I think I read assent in your faces."

For Ursula and Alianora had turned eagerly to each other, and had as though by common consent clasped hands as if in glad congratulation.

"Ah, mother, is it really so? May I and Alianora go to London together?"

"Ay, verily, so far as journeying together goes; and glad shall I be to feel that thou art with our white dove when she maketh this first flight from her ark. But, children, listen well and heed what I say. When London is gained, thou, Alianora, wilt to thy father's house—a proud mansion, I doubt not, befitting his degree; whilst thou, my daughter, wilt be the guest of one who is but a merchant of the Fleet: and it behoveth both of you to bear in mind that the daughters of peers and of merchants do not hold converse one of another. Nay, children, think not that I would bid you forget your love, or cease to think and pray for each other even as sisters; but I would not have you build too much on the frequent meetings that might be possible did not your paths in life lie wide apart. It may be, my Alianora, that thy father, in remembrance of the tie that bindeth thee to us, will permit

thee to visit even at a merchant's house, or bid Ursula welcome at thine own doors; but if he think it well to sever somewhat sharply the friendship of the past, I would that thou givest him all reverent heed and dutiful obedience. Let him not have cause to say that in the house of Christopher Furnival his daughter learned the lesson of self-will and rebellion against lawful submission to parents."

"Madam, he shall not," answered Alianora with gentle firmness; "and I will e'en try to honour him in all things; but methinks he can scarce forbid that I should see and visit with Ursula whilst she remaineth nigh at hand. And ah, to feel that she is there will be such comfort and peace! At least I can get letters passed betwixt us without fear of rebuke. O madam—sweet mother—I thank thee ten thousand times for this boon. My heart was like to break but a few short moments back at thought of the farewells which lay before me; but now I can be brave once more, when I know that there will be yet one of those I love, and she so very dear, to be at my side when I go forth from hence."

"There will be more than one—there will be two," said Mrs. Furnival, turning once again to her daughter, so that she did not see the strange illumination of joy that lighted Alianora's face at the sound of her next words. "Thy brother, Ursula, hath been talking with yon stranger, Mr. Bertie—a very honest, courtly gentleman—and he hath come to his father with his petition to go out, as hath always been his talk, to try his fortune on the high seas.

It is hard for us here at home to know what is best for the lad; but Mr. Bertie speaks sooth when he says that for a youth bred up to the profession of arms it is poor work loitering here at home, waiting for the war which cometh not, and which by God's mercy may never come in our day. He tells us that there is good work to be done in the Low Countries, where thousands of Englishmen are serving the States—not sent by the Queen, but going of their own will and taking service under the Prince of Orange; and that on the seas are hundreds of roving soldiers, sweeping the ocean, and crippling the power of Spain, as only England can. Humphrey is all for the sea, though his father leaneth rather to the more regular service by land. But the end of all is that he goes to London likewise, to be one of thy escort, and a guest at thine uncle's house for the nonce; and when in the heart of the great city whereunto all men flock in these days, he must e'en judge for himself, and act as seemeth best, and according to the advice of those who are best able to judge."

"Ah, mother, that is good hearing. I would fain have one of the home faces with me in a strange house, and Humphrey hath been pining this many a day to be up and doing when so much is stirring in the world. But methinks if we are so many of us to start forth right soon, it is no time to be loitering here in talk. I would fain be making ready. I shall think the better if my hands are full of work. What is most pressing to be done? Give me but a task, and I shall perchance feel less as if my head were all in a maze."

The mother smiled; but in truth there was need for activity, and she rose up with the air of one who does not mean to let the grass grow beneath her feet.

"Ay, my daughter, thou speakest truly: there is much to be done. Thy sister and cousins are already away to the ironing-tables, where is work enough for you all for the day. We must start off a messenger with tidings of thy coming to thy good uncle. That he will welcome thee warmly I do not doubt, but we will not take him by surprise. Thou, my daughter, hast but small need of grand robes and jewels, and this maiden will be furnished by her father when she reaches his house; but such garments as thou takest with thee must be in such condition as will not shame thy mother. So join them likewise, Ursula, and see to thine own and thy brothers' ruffs and such like gear. Well it is that our spring-tide wash is completed. We should be sore pressed had we that to accomplish as well."

Ursula betook herself quickly to the laundry, Alianora gliding after her like a shadow. There was no washing done in the winter months in those days; but early in the spring there was a grand wash of all the clothing worn during the late season, and therefore a regular outfit of under garments was considered indispensable to every member of the household. At times like these such arrangements had their advantage, and there was little extra preparation to be made even for a sudden visit of indeterminate length.

Ursula found Bess and her cousins hard at work over

the ironing-tables, their faces flushed with excitement, their tongues going as fast as their arms.

"By my troth, Ursula, thou art a lucky girl," cried Barbara the moment her cousin appeared: "would it were my hap to be carried off thus to London, to see the fine shows they will make for her Majesty's nuptials. I would thou couldest wear my farthingales—as thou couldest an thou wert not so tall and I such an elf; then shouldest thou have the one my father sent me last, with crimson velvet flowers embroidered on a gold ground, and the quilted satin petticoat sewn with garnets. I dare not wear such gear here, lest they should cry out upon me for aping the Court dames—like the jackdaw of the fable with the peacock's plumes. I would thou couldest wear it for me, Ursula; thinkest thou that thy clever fingers could make shift to fashion it in some sort for thyself?"

Ursula smiled at the question, for her sprightly little cousin was head and shoulders shorter than herself, but she thanked her for her good-will, and bid her not be in such haste to part with her fine plumes, as the day might well come when she would need them all herself. Barbara shook her head and laughed, and darting away brought back in her hands a rich coif and veil, and some trinkets in the way of clasps and brooches, and these she flung down before Ursula, saying,—

"At least thou shalt have these. I need them not and want them not, but in sooth it would please me to think that they had done service to some one. Take them, good Ursula, and vex me not by thy denial. It may be thou

wilt yet be summoned to the Court, and I would fain think if that day came that I had had a hand in thy adornment."

Ursula smiled as she gathered up the trinkets and thanked the generous donor, but she added with a shake of the head,—

"Methinks it is little I shall see of the Court. Remember, Barbara, our uncle is but a merchant, and where his daughter goes not, neither, whilst I am beneath his roof, shall I go."

"Oh, methinks things are changing somewhat in these days," answered Barbara, with a little toss of her head. "The rich merchant is better thought of than the poverty-stricken gentleman. By my troth, if good Master West hath half the fortune he is credited with, his daughter will put thee to the blush an I mistake not: therefore it behoveth thee to take all that thou canst get, to show her that other folks have their fine gauds as well as she."

Here Bess looked up from her ironing to say,—

"Our uncle is a wealthy man, I doubt not; but I have heard our father say that he is not one to try and push his way into a different rank from that to which he was born. He is an honest and a God-fearing man, and hath likely brought up his only child right well. If report say true, Mistress Constance is as good as she is beautiful, and as beautiful as she will one day be rich. I would she had been to see us, as father asked; but she never could be prevailed upon to leave her own father alone. I would we knew more of the house whither Ursula is going, but I trow she will be happy there. I remember our uncle

well when he came—a big man, but kind and fatherly to us all."

"I would not have our Ursula outshone by any merchant's daughter," muttered Barbara under her breath; for the little Welsh maiden had no lack of pride of blood, albeit there was lack of much else in the coffers of her home, so much so that her father was roving the seas, not without success in the shape of Spanish plunder wherewith to restore the fallen fortunes of his house.

Mr. Furnival's sister had been thought to marry somewhat below her in wedding a simple merchant, just as Mr. Furnival himself had looked rather above him in choosing his own wife. But the intercourse maintained between the two houses, though infrequent, was always cordial; and though Mrs. West had died a year or two back, the interchange of home news and simple gifts had never entirely ceased. When the merchant had had occasion to travel that way, and had paid a visit to his kinsman, he had been hospitably entertained, and had begged for a visit from one of his young kinswomen to his daughter, then absent for her education, but shortly coming home. This visit had been half promised and many times talked of, but the length of the journey, the unsettled state of the country, and the reluctance of Bess or Ursula to be parted from their companions, had all combined to hinder the plan,—until this sudden summons to Alianora, and the request of Humphrey to join the party to London, seemed to furnish the very opportunity that had been looked for so long.

No wonder that excitement reigned all over the house. The maids were busy in one place, the girls in another, and Barbara was not the only one who ransacked her hoards to furnish forth the wherewithal for Ursula's adornment on the occasion of her first visit to London. Her mother knew well, despite the fact that the girl's rank was higher than that of her uncle, that she was going to a house where there would be greater show of wealth than any she had seen in her life before. And were it true that there would be feastings and pageants for the coming nuptials of the Queen, Ursula would have need of all the fine garments her father could bestow upon her.

And so there was a rummaging of ancient chests, an overlooking of bygone splendours in the shape of quaint rich garments now out of date which had belonged to Mrs. Furnival's mother and grand-dame and aunts; and busy deft fingers were set to work to rip and cut and remake, and there was the chattering of eager tongues to the accompaniment of the click of flying needles, and such an array of rich garments soon contrived as fairly took Ursula's breath away.

Richly-embroidered farthingales, stiff-quilted underpetticoats, bodices trimmed with costly feather-work from the sailor-uncle's stores, and ruffs and under-vests of lace or the finest silk from the looms of the East, seemed to appear as by magic beneath the fingers of the willing girls, who all worked under the superintendence of the lady of the house. Ursula exclaimed that she should not know herself in such finery; but Barbara clapped her hands at every new achievement, and only longed to be

there to see her cousin's "gallant show," as she called it. Mrs. Furnival, when once aroused to the knowledge that her daughter would need some rich garments even in a merchant's house, was resolved that her equipment should befit her birth; and it was with a motherly pride she would never have betrayed, but of which she was nevertheless keenly conscious, that she saw her stately daughter arrayed in robes that seemed to enhance to no small degree the beauty and dignity she undoubtedly possessed.

Saturday, Sunday, Monday flew by as if time had taken to itself wings, and there still remained much to be done. Yet the start was fixed for the Wednesday morning, and nobody desired delay. There was too much sadness about last days, even such busy ones, for those concerned to wish them prolonged; and as Alianora was not to part at once from the two in that household she held most dear, she was as ready now as she could ever be for the day of departure. And her fingers were the most active and skilful of all, for in the sweet task of working, perhaps for the last time, with her comrades and in the service of Ursula she was able to forget sometimes the heavy load that lay like lead upon her heart.

Small wonder was it, therefore, in that busy household, where all heads and hearts were alike busily occupied, that there was little thought to spare for aught beside the coming partings and the immediate business in hand, and that the condition of the wounded lad away in the guest-chamber should fail to be noted with the same quickness that in other circumstances would have been the case.

It was not that he was neglected. Mrs. Furnival, with the assistance of Honora or a servant—an old nurse long in the family—dressed his wound each day, and visited him twice or thrice, as the case might be, to inquire of his welfare and ask if he desired aught. But Mr. Bertie took the main tendance of his young comrade upon himself, and he saw naught amiss with the lad save a greater feebleness than seemed warranted by the slightness of the injury. Then, as nothing seemed so grateful to Beauchamp as to be left alone in the dark, with the windows curtained to exclude every ray of light, he was indulged in his fancy to his heart's content, and left, as was supposed, to sleep off his weakness, and fit himself for a resumption of his journey in due course.

It was on Tuesday morning that Honora came to Barbara in the still-room, where the latter was at work, with a look of perplexity upon her fair face.

"What wouldst thou have me do, Bess?" she asked. "I like not to trouble the sweet mother without cause, but methinks she cannot know how sick Lord Beauchamp is, or she would never permit him to depart on the morrow, as he speaks of doing. I like not the look his arm bears; and I fear it pains him more now than at first, for he scarce could bear my handling of it this day, and he never flinched before. And he eats nothing that we send him; it comes down again untouched. And he looks so white and feeble, I doubt me if he could sit his horse for a brief half-hour."

"And doth mother know all this?"

"I trow not. To-day she bade me go with old nurse to tend his arm, and she hath seen not the look it bears, which I like not. And she hath so much to think of in these days that she cannot know everything that passeth in his chamber. But listen farther, Bess. He said that he would try to take some broth when I begged he would, and but half-an-hour back when I carried it to him, finding all others busy, he had made shift to rise and dress himself; but was lying back on the settle looking more dead than alive. When I rebuked him, he said he had tried because Mr. Bertie had bidden him be ready for the saddle to-morrow; but I misdoubt me if any know how ill he really be. He makes no complaint, and says that he is better; and they do not see that he grows daily worse."

"If that be so, we had better speak to father, as mother hath already more upon her hands than she can well compass. See here, Honora, help me with these jars, for I cannot leave them till they are all tied down and put in order; and then we will go to father and tell him what thou sayest, and he shall judge."

The girls set to work, and the task was soon finished: then they went in search of Mr. Furnival, who was overlooking some of the horses to be used upon the journey on the morrow, taking counsel with Mr. Bertie as to which would be most serviceable. He and his guest were by this time on very friendly terms, and spent many hours of the day riding or walking together, and exchanging ideas as to the state of the country, and many like matters.

Honora would not have ventured to say a word; but

Bess was more downright and less in awe of the soldier-guest. She repeated her cousin's words and her opinion as to Lord Beauchamp's unfitness to travel; and then at her father's command both the girls followed him and Mr. Bertie to the guest-chamber to inquire further of the youth himself as to his condition.

Beauchamp was still on the settle, looking more like a shadow than a creature of flesh and blood. He was so spent with pain and with the exertion of rising that he could scarcely answer when spoken to; and when the arm was unbound for examination, Mr. Bertie looked grave and shook his head, and seemed to understand full well why it was that Honora had spoken of not liking its appearance.

"There is some kind of poisoning here," he said. "I know well the look of that dark swelling and angry inflammation. I have known limbs lost that began but by just such a look as that. I fear the lad hath much to suffer yet ere he win through."

"He must not be moved, that is plain."

"He cannot travel save in a horse-litter; but we might move him to some leech's house, where he could be tended. His father's house is too far; moreover, my Lady Frances would give him but scant welcome."

"Talk not of moving him, good friend," said Mr. Furnival. "What I said when the hurt seemed but trifling I repeat the more heartily now. Leave the lad to my wife. Know you what treatment he would receive at the hands of a leech? First, the good man would bleed

him again and yet again to subdue the fever, and then he would sear the wound with hot irons to draw out the poison. Methinks he hath lost blood enough already, let the fever run as it may, and hath suffered enough with that arm without any such savage surgery. My wife hath wrought as many cures by her merciful dealings as the barbers and leeches with their lancets and such-like tools. Let him e'en stay where he is, and I'll warrant he'll win through yet. See, the lad's own eyes say as much.—You do not weary of the tendance you have here, that you are longing to be elsewhere?"

Beauchamp's few faint words of gratitude and thanks were cut short by the master of the house.

"Content you, boy, content you. Rest assured you shall not quit my roof till you can do so in better guise than now. Your comrade must leave you on the morrow; but when this stir and coil is over, I wot you will have comrades enough and to spare, who will gladly listen to your tales of adventure and what not, and will make up to you for the loss of your friend." And the speaker stole a sly glance at the two girls, to which Bess responded by a flashing smile free from all constraint; whilst the fair-faced Honora coloured to the roots of her hair, and was glad to turn her face away; but the room was dim, and no one heeded her blush. And the matter was thus settled out of hand, with little suspicion of what it was destined to lead to.

Bertie was not a little relieved. He was in no wise responsible for the lad, who had joined him uninvited, and

was no kindred of his; albeit his mother had always been friendly to the Greys, and had let them give her the title of grand-dame. But he knew the lad was unhappy at home, and suspected in some quarters as likely to be made a tool of, should any harm befall the young King of Scots. The royal jealousy of the house of Grey had almost worn itself out, yet with any change in factions it might still revive, and the lad was likely to have but a troubled life. So anything that promised present rest and obscurity was the more welcome; and Bertie was well content thus to leave one whom he could not but look upon in some sort as a charge.

But unless it were Honora, few in that household had thought to spare that day for Beauchamp; for was it not Alianora's last day at home? and was not Ursula about to depart for a long visit on the morrow, and Humphrey for a sojourn of which no one could as yet see the end?

And when on the morrow the laden pack-horses and the maidens' palfreys stood at the door, champing their bits and pawing the ground, whilst Mr. Bertie's handsome charger looked on calmly like a king amongst them all, there were tears in many eyes unused to weep; and Mr. Furnival and his tall sons had much ado to keep their voices cheerful and their faces set in smiles, to give a festive air to the departure of the cavalcade. Laughing Barbara was weeping now with the hearty good-will that characterized all her proceedings; and Honora's lily cheek was whiter than its wont with the effort to restrain her emotion. Mrs. Furnival kept her composure, though her eyes were

full of tears as she strained Alianora in her arms, and laid her hand in blessing on the head of her first-born. Those two did indeed seem going out for ever from the old home; but the parting with Ursula was a less trial, for she would soon be back again.

And so amid a chorus of farewells the little cavalcade started; and the mother said in her heart as she turned away,—

"God grant that I may live to see them all together yet again before I die!"

CHAPTER IV.

OLD LONDON.

IT was about five o'clock on a bright, clear afternoon that our little band of travellers first came in sight of the spires and towers of the ancient city of London, and drew rein by common consent to gaze upon the scene, whilst their guide, Mr. Bertie (for in that light they had learned to look upon him), pointed out some of the most notable landmarks, and indicated to Alianora the direction of Whitehall and her future home.

The great river ran between them and their destination, —the river Thames, fraught with so many historic associations. Humphrey, indeed, had seen both it and London several years before, but to the girls everything was new and wonderful; and as the party moved onwards, Humphrey riding at Alianora's bridle rein, whilst Mr. Bertie and Ursula followed a little behind, even the thought of the impending separation was driven from the minds of both girls by the interest and the admiration excited by their first sight of the famous city.

"We shall cross London Bridge, shall we not?" asked Ursula of her companion as they moved through the ward

of Southwark, which had even in those days sprung up on the opposite side of the river.

"Ay, truly; there is no other way save by a barge or wherry. It is a fine structure, with its twenty stone arches, each sixty feet in height; its drawbridge, which kept out Sir Thomas Wyatt from entering the city in that insurrection of his, which you will not remember; and its rows of shops on either side. And look you away to the right: that great mass of buildings you see there is the Tower. In yon gloomy fortress young Beauchamp was born; and many a head has fallen beneath the headsman's axe within its environing walls."

Ursula looked with a feeling betwixt horror and admiration at the massive pile, and turned with eager intelligence to hear all that her companion could tell her. Throughout the three days' journey she had been his partner whenever the road had been too narrow to permit of their riding four abreast: for Humphrey and Alianora seemed to draw together as by mutual consent; and Ursula, even though it might be the last week of her life in which she could freely enjoy the society of her beloved brother, would not grudge him to Alianora—for was not the approaching parting between those two sadder than any that overshadowed her? and might not these last days be all that the girl would have to live upon for many long and dreary years?

At first it had been for Alianora's sake that this arrangement had been made; but the longer she travelled in his company the more impressed was Ursula by Mr.

Bertie's intelligence, information, and true friendliness, although he lacked something of the courtier's supple graces, and was the soldier and the traveller rather than the fine gentleman of the times. Ursula was not like to find this out, however, for she knew little of courtly ways; and homely courtesy and frank good faith were all she sought or wished in those about her. So she and her companion improved their acquaintance, and felt like old friends ere they reached the walls of London; and when Mr. Bertie put his next request, she was flattered and pleased and ready to give a warm assent, in as far as she was able to do so.

"Fair Mistress Ursula," he said, "I would fain think that this pleasant friendship will come not to an end with our arrival at your uncle's house. My wife, though her health compels her to live in quiet and seclusion, is fain to welcome beneath our roof any guest who will in kindness come to enliven her retirement with news from the world without. She is resident in my mother's old house in the Minories, beyond the walls, just without Aldgate. Your uncle will know how to conduct you there; and if it would not weary you to go thither some day when your leisure permits, I warrant you will find a welcome awaiting you."

"I thank you, sir; and if mine uncle permit me, I will gladly do myself the pleasure to crave an audience of the Lady Mary. We are greatly beholden to you for your countenance and protection upon this journey; and as you will not let me speak my thanks to you, I would fain con-

vey them to your wife, who, methinks, will receive them with a better grace."

Bertie laughed, and might have made some retort, but that an interruption now occurred which drove all else from Ursula's mind for the nonce.

They had closely approached the bridge by now. Of their party, two serving-men in the livery of the Earl of Courtland were riding in advance to clear the way of all encumbrances, whilst following the four travellers were Mr. Bertie's servants, and those appointed to carry the mails of the girls, so that altogether they formed quite a little cavalcade, which attracted some small notice from the passers-by as it advanced. And now from beneath the shelter of the ancient houses there suddenly appeared a very fine young gallant, mounted upon a beautifully caparisoned steed, whose chestnut coat shone like satin in the sun. The rider was attired after the latest fashion of the day, in all the bravery of silk and velvet, with a plumed hat, a jewelled sword-hilt, and a short cloak, the collar of which was stiff with the gems that were worked cunningly into it. His embroidered gloves and the finish of every detail of his dress proclaimed him at once a gentleman of the Court. But it was upon his face that Ursula's eyes were bent, and something in the delicacy of the features, the brilliance of the smile, and the wondrous luminous softness of the melting dark eyes made her turn to her companion with a start and say,—

"Surely yon brave gallant is none other than the Viscount Lisle. I know him by his likeness to our Alianora."

Bertie bent a keen look upon the new-comer and said,—

"It is many years since I have looked upon Viscount Lisle, but methinks you are right; and, see, his servants wear the Earl's livery. He hath surely come forth to meet the lady his sister. That were kindly done, and speaketh well for his good-will and courtesy."

Owing to the encumbrances in the traffic as they neared the bridge, Humphrey and Alianora had reined in their horses, and the others came up to them just as the young courtier, with his plumed hat in his hand, had reached the party, and was looking from one girl's face to the other.

"Methinks in one of these fair damsels I am to find my sister," he said in a voice that was strangely like that of Alianora, despite its deeper masculine ring; and so saying his glance fastened itself upon Alianora's face, and she, recognizing him by a sort of instinct, put out her hand, whilst he bent forward and saluted her on the cheek.

"Welcome, fair sister; welcome to London, and to the home that you will brighten by the light of your countenance. And present me, I pray you, to these good friends, who have so safely conducted you hither. I would fain thank them for the care they have used in transporting our sweet lily, so that none of its sweetness and freshness is lost.—Methinks I should know your face, good sir; and yet that tricksy elf we call memory will not give me the name by which you should be called."

"Peregrine Bertie is my name, at your service, young

sir," was the direct answer of the soldier; but at that the viscount smiled once more and said,—

"Nay, my Lord Willoughby, Mr. Bertie has well-nigh ceased to exist. We have to learn a new name for one who will grace it right well. Methinks you are here to take upon yourself that new title, and to answer your summons to Parliament."

Bertie bent his head; and the party moved slowly on together, whilst the courtly viscount exchanged greetings with the two Furnivals, and amused himself with the wonder of the girls at the sights of the town. The shops upon the bridge, with their overhanging upper stories and their motley wares displayed below; the hoarse cries of the vendors, who stood in the doorway shouting to the passers-by; the quaint garb of the apprentices, each clad in his own livery; the throng of passers-by, and the sight of here and there a new-fangled chariot amongst the pack and saddle horses, well-nigh blocking up the road with its cumbersome wheels and body,—all filled the girls with the extreme of wonder and curiosity. The dress of the people was in itself a study; and as for the houses, they had never pictured such a number all together, and were silent for very wonder as they passed along.

The viscount, greatly entertained by such rustic simplicity, and desirous to give pleasure to his fair sister, eschewed the nearest route along Thames Street, which would have given little variety in its sights, and pursued the way up New Fish Street and Gracechurch Street to Lombard Street, and there Mr. Bertie halted and bade them farewell.

"Since you are under such trusty escort, I will crave your permission to say farewell, and leave you to seek mine own home and my wife.—Fair Mistress Ursula, I trust to you to remember your promise.—My Lady Alianora, and you, good Master Humphrey, I wish you a present adieu. You will know where to find me when your plans are made" (this in a low voice to Humphrey); "and whatever my poor influence with our sailor kings can avail shall not be lacking you. You and your sister will both be welcome to the Minories at such time as you will find leisure thus far to favour us. We can speak at ease there of all these matters.—Young sir, farewell. Commend me to my lord your father. I resign my fair charge gladly into your hands."

With an exchange of compliments all round, such as was common in those days, Mr. Bertie rode away up Fenchurch Street, in the direction of Aldgate and the Minories, followed by his servants; whilst the viscount placed himself between the two girls, and Humphrey guarded Alianora on the other side.

Westward along the Poultry, Cheapside, and through St. Paul's Churchyard rode the little procession, the wider roadway and the appearance of wealth in the character of the shops and buildings exciting great admiration in the minds of the girls. The great church itself was in those days remarkable for little but its size, being but an ugly building to look at. The spire had been burnt down some twenty years before, and the church itself was desecrated into a sort of fashionable lounging-place for Court gallants

and for bargaining and traffic of all sorts. The girls, in their innocence and ignorance, thought that some service must be going on, seeing the people thronging in; but the viscount told them this was far from being the case, and promised Alianora that on the morrow, if she were not too greatly fatigued by her journey, he would take her to see the great church.

"The Catholics throw it in our teeth that thus we degrade the holy places dedicated to the worship of God; but that is false, for it was they who began to make a mart of the church, and they use it for such purposes as much as any. Our Bishop Elmere would fain cleanse it of such dealings; but public custom is too strong for him. And the Queen's Majesty cares little for these things. After all she is the daughter of the man who gambled away the fine peal of bells upon a throw of the dice."

"Did great King Hal do that?" questioned Humphrey. "How came he possessed of the bells of St. Paul's?"

"Nay, that I cannot tell you. King Hal became possessed of many things and many places no man knew how or wherefore. But the bells of Paul's were lost to Sir Miles Partridge at a throw of the dice, and were taken away and melted down; and that is well known to all."

"And whither go we now?" asked Alianora, as they passed through Ludgate; "and whither does this wide road lead?"

"It leads past the Conduit and into Fleet Street, where dwells the worshipful Master Peter West, at whose house fair Mistress Ursula and Master Humphrey are to be

dropped. That road to the right is the Old Bailey, which leads by Pie Corner to Smithfield, of which doubtless you have heard;" and as Alianora shuddered involuntarily and averted her eyes as if unwilling even to look that way, he laughed and laid a hand upon hers tenderly.

"Ah, we burn not our heretics in the reign of good Queen Bess, as our faithful citizens call her, and as she loves to be named by them. We have left behind those evil days, and trust they will never more return; which is one cause why there be those who would fain compass the death of the hapless Queen of Scots. They say that so long as she lives we shall ever stand in danger of Pope and Inquisition and the blazing pile; but methinks there is but scant chance that the captive will see light or liberty again. The Queen's Majesty saved her life when her own people would have destroyed her. And those who best know her and her ways aver that she will never rest till she hath stirred up such rebellion and strife in this land as shall cause our nation to demand her death as the only reparation for her crimes. But I know not how such things may be. 'Tis a vexed question, which perplexes wiser heads than mine, and one cannot but pity the captive lady, guilty though she doubtless be of many and great sins."

"But and if the Queen purpose this French alliance, as she seemeth at last to do," said Humphrey, "surely we may hope that the vexed matter of the succession will be set at rest in the best and simplest way, and trouble our minds no more about the danger of a Catholic sovereign."

But the viscount only laughed.

"Ay, if she be in earnest; but her ladies of the bedchamber say she gibes at the prince in private, and vows she will wed nor him nor any other, albeit in Council she speaks in all seriousness of her wish to yield to her people's desires; and the Ambassadors are coming over with the treaty. Ay, and there will be fine doings at the palace and in the city. There is a new hall being built there for the pageants which are to do them honour.—Sister mine, I have much to show you; and if this fair lady will accept my poor escort, I would fain beg her company also whilst I take you to see this building and describe the wonders to be performed there. How now, Alianora? methinks you look pleased at the thought. We will e'en consider it settled.—And you, good sir, will attend your sister, and I will do the honours of our Queen's palace, in as far as it may be shown to strangers whilst her Majesty is in residence there."

Humphrey and Ursula thanked him, and an appointment was made for the following week, and then the party paused and looked about them, for they were approaching Temple Bar, and knew that Master Peter West's house must be nigh at hand.

On either side of the thoroughfare rose quaint buildings of a kind that betokened wealth and affluence in the owners. The overhanging gabled upper stories, intersected with heavy beams of oak now black with age, were in excellent repair; the latticed windows shone with cleanliness, and through an open casement in one of these the travellers

could see that the hangings were of costly tapestry or brocade, denoting a luxury unknown in many baronial houses farther away from the centres of political or commercial activity. And at this upper window a tall maiden was standing looking down into the street with a gaze of eager expectancy. Her face was very lovely, and her hair, which was piled up in a mass of curls, surmounted by a small and dainty lace coif, was of the ruddy golden hue which was prized above all other in that age, out of compliment to the Queen. Her farthingale and bodice were of the finest white camelot, embroidered with azure flowers, and the silken under-petticoat was of the same azure hue. The waistcoat was of linen, white as snow, with something of the masculine cut, which found favour even in those days with ladies of fashion; whilst the ruff was larger than those generally worn in the country, and rose high behind the head, in a way that was very becoming to many, and certainly to the fair girl looking down into the street from this coin of vantage. As the little cavalcade paused almost under the window, she disappeared from her station, and in a few moments more the door of the house opened, and forth came several serving-men in sober suits, hardly to be called livery, albeit they who wore them were plainly of the rank of servants, and at their head a portly man in rich attire—the attire of the wealthy merchant in the days of Elizabeth.

A flat velvet cap, a stiff-plaited ruff encircling the neck, a long embroidered robe of some rich stuff, which descended from the neck till about half-way between knee and ankle,

and was confined at the waist by a girdle, the robe being trimmed with fur and with broad bands of crimson silk. The sleeves clothed the arm to the elbow, after which they descended almost to the hem of the robe, whilst an under-sleeve of white cambric, finished off by a silken cuff, formed the real covering to the arm. Silken hose and tanned-leather shoes and gloves completed the attire. And as Master Peter West advanced from his doorway to greet his young kinsfolk, he presented an aspect at once gorgeous and dignified, and Ursula was right glad to see the benevolence which beamed from his face, as he advanced and lifted her from her horse. So far away from home, surrounded by what was strange and bewildering, it needed this touch of nature to make the girl feel that here at least was some kind of a home, strange as it might be at first.

But after that first warm salutation, whilst Master West was paying his *devoirs* to the young viscount, whom by sight he knew, and thanking him with elaborate courtesy for the favour shown his poor house by this condescension on his part, Ursula was claimed by the white-robed maiden with the red-gold locks, and was drawn within the shelter of the ample porch.

"My cousin Ursula!" said Constance, with many kisses to fill up the pause; "how I have been counting the days, sweet coz, till you could be here! My father has promised so long to make me known to my kindred, that I had almost given up hope of seeing him redeem his word. Nay, and tell me is that fair maid another cousin? I would fain welcome her likewise if she be."

"No, no; that is the Lady Alianora de Frene. Wot you not she hath been in my mother's care, and is but just sent for to join her father here? We are like sisters in love. I must e'en slip out and speak my farewell."

"Nay, but see, she is dismounting from her horse.—Is that thy brother, Ursula—that goodly youth who is lifting her down? Why, he is a very son of Anak, and would find favour at Court should the Queen cast her eye upon him. They say she favours them of goodly stature and presence.—Is not that my Lord Lisle dismounting now? Can it be that they are coming in?"

Constance was far more astonished at such condescension on the part of Lord Courtland's son and daughter than the more simple-minded and less worldly-wise Ursula could be. Even the merchant, who in the hospitality of his heart had spoken of the meal about to be served, and had prayed that the lady, who looked aweary, might deign to refresh herself at his poor board, had not expected that his invitation would be accepted. But the viscount was young and frank-hearted. He was in no haste to reach home, where he knew no father would be awaiting his daughter's return, as the Earl would be at the palace, and would not return till a late hour. He knew that the parting from her old comrades would be hard for Alianora, and was willing to delay it as long as might be; and it need not be denied that a glance at the beautiful Constance had put the finishing touch to a resolution half arrived at ere the merchant's speech was finished.

And so it came about that the daughter of peer, squire,

and merchant all sat down together to the table of the latter, constrained by the viscount to do so, else would Constance and her father have waited upon their guests. But merchant though he was, Master West was a man of intelligence and culture; and as to his table appointments, and the delicacy and choice of the viands offered for their refreshment, Ursula had never seen the like before, and the viscount observed to himself with a laugh that many a nobleman was less well served.

"And how goes it with the Queen's most gracious Majesty?" asked the worthy merchant, who had pledged his sovereign in a cup of such choice canary as the viscount had seldom tasted before; and as the Court gallant was thus appealed to he laughed merrily as he replied,—

"I trust we find her better than last week, when she was suffering so sorely from the toothache that the whole business of the realm was like to have come to a standstill. She could think of nothing but the pain, and the leeches could find no remedy for it."

"Mayhap the tooth was past a cure, and needed removing," said the merchant. "Poor lady! it seemeth strange that sovereigns should suffer thus, like us of common clay."

"So said her Majesty herself, and raged terribly that none could cure her. And so they must needs send to a wise man noted for his cures of such-like ills; but they would not trust him about her Majesty's person, lest he should infuse some subtle poison into the jaw which might result in her death. And he bid them look well if the tooth was not altogether decayed, as indeed was the case, saying that if

that were so there was but one way for it, and that to have it removed."

"And what said her Majesty thereunto?"

Why, she vowed she dared not try so terrible a remedy, and her whole Council spent one long hour reasoning with her, but all to no purpose. And then what does my Lord Bishop of London do but rise from his place and kneel before her Majesty, protesting that though an old man and with few teeth to spare, he will yet sacrifice one in her service, and have it removed in her very presence, so that she might e'en see it was no such fearful thing. And then and there he had in the barber, or leech, whatever you may call him, and moved not so much as an eyelid whilst the tooth was pulled out; whereat her Majesty plucked up heart of grace and let them take out her own. And so that coil is ended, and I trust my Lord Treasurer and Mr. Secretary can proceed with the business of the State."

Ursula was half afraid to let her amusement be seen, having been brought up in deep reverence of the Queen's person; but Constance's clear laugh rang out freely, and the viscount turned to her with a visible admiration in his expressive eyes.

There was no difficulty in making conversation for one who lived in the heart of the city, and was well informed on the latest news from abroad as well as from home. Constance had been her father's companion for many years, and he talked to her in consequence with a freedom and unreserve not usual between father and child in those days. Moreover he was a hospitable man, who brought home to

his house men of all degree; and thus the girl was well used to the part of hostess, and could play it with both ease and grace. It was not often that so gay a gallant as the viscount graced their table; but notwithstanding that she felt no fear of him, and could not but be pleased by his attentions and his engaging address. So, whilst her father engrossed Humphrey in talk about the home he had left, and Ursula and Alianora sat close together, whispering fond farewells and promises into each other's ears, the viscount and his fair hostess had leisure to give to one another, and found no lack of matter for discussion.

"We are devising a gay pageant wherewith to gratify her Majesty when it shall please her to take the Ambassadors the round of the city. There will be all the customary bravery, the guilds and 'prentices in their liveries, and the mummers and morris-dancers at the open spaces rehearsing their speeches of welcome; but we are devising a newer pageant than we have had this many a year before, and they tell me that I am to take great part therein."

"I marvel not at that," said the viscount, with a glance that sent the maiden's colour flying up. "Know you not that you strangely favour our royal lady? You have the same tint of hair and clear skin, the lofty carriage of the head, and even something of the same stamp of feature, albeit it scarce amounts to a likeness. The sharpness of the lines is smoothed away, and—" But he paused and did not finish his sentence, for although he could have found many comparisons in Constance's favour, it was such a point of honour amongst Court gallants to speak of the

Queen as of a matchless beauty, that it seemed like treason to say anything which might be construed to her disadvantage. He therefore changed the fashion of his discourse, and asked, "And may I be informed of the nature of this pageant?"

"Ay, marry, you may, an you will keep it to yourself, for we would not have our secrets spoken openly at Court. We are taming a fair herd of white deer, who will be led to meet the Queen in gold trappings, attended by archers in green and gold; and eight of the most beauteous will be harnessed to a chariot, in which, they tell me, I am to stand, robed as Diana, and there to make a long oration to her Majesty, of which I fear she will sadly weary ere it be done. I am aweary of it myself in good sooth, but I must not tell my good father so, or it would ill please him."

"Diana—ay, the chaste huntress—that conceit will well please our royal lady. And they have chosen you for the likeness you bear to her; is it not so?"

"Ay, truly, I have heard it said that I favour her, and my dress is to be made to add to that look as far as may be. I trust her gracious Majesty will not be ill pleased. She will not count it presumption on my part?"

"Never fear; she will but be flattered. She delights in all such spectacles, and with such a fair conceit as that she may well be enchanted. It ought to win for you an entrance to our gallant tourney, of which you will soon hear too much. An you are not aweary of such spectacles, I would fain see you and fair Mistress Ursula there."

Constance's eyes brightened, but she smiled and shook her head.

"I am but a simple city maiden, fair sir," she answered, "and such brave shows are not for me; but I give you thanks for your courtesy ne'ertheless. Men say that it will be a gallant sight, and that you will break a lance there for our Queen."

And the glance of Mistress Constance's violet-blue eyes seemed to intimate that that performance would be to her the event of the day were she present.

But content as the viscount was with his present companion and the good cheer of the merchant's table, he could not linger long. His sister had travelled many miles that day, and was looking worn out and white (though this was more through grief at parting than from fatigue), and the dusk would shortly fall, which made it the more urgent that they should reach the shelter of home. No one hindered their going, and Lord Lisle, in taking his leave of Ursula and her brother, gave them warm thanks for the care of his sister, and held out many promises for future meetings. He at least had no desire to effect a separation, and the girls said farewell with more of comfort than they could have done an hour before.

"Methinks thy brother hath a kind heart, and will be good to thee, my Alianora," whispered Ursula. "Take heart and courage, and try to find happiness in thy new life. It maybe will be fairer than thou deemest now."

Alianora was afraid to trust her voice, and her farewell to Humphrey was but the silent pressure of the hand which

had lifted her to the saddle; but as the viscount sprang to his seat, and rode at his sister's side through the dark arch of Temple Bar and onwards towards the city of Westminster, he saw that she had no thought to spare for the objects of historic interest that lay in her path, and he let her have time to recover herself ere attempting even words of brotherly kindness and good cheer.

Their way led them past the Queen's Palace, as Whitehall was then customarily called, the modern name not coming into general use until the next reign. He made her look at the fine gateway as they passed, and told her how King Henry VIII. had taken forcible possession of the place (which Wolsey had converted into a palace for his own use) so soon as the old royal palace of Westminster had grown too small and too dilapidated to please him. Much had been done by succeeding sovereigns to enlarge the building, and St. James's Park had been enclosed and drained and laid out according to the king's pleasure, in order that he might take pastime there at will. But though Alianora listened and tried to take interest in what she heard, she felt as if she was living through a strange fevered dream, and that she should soon wake up to find herself within the peaceful precincts of Wyndgate Manor.

They passed the grand abbey and old palace, and turned southward towards the river, halting at length at a fine gateway which led to a large house that had the air of being overlarge for the persons who dwelt there. The gate opened as the travellers appeared, and the little train passed into a paved court-yard, in the centre of which was

a broken fountain, set in a circle of smooth green turf. Opposite the gate was the main door of the house, to which access was given by a flight of marble steps, likewise somewhat chipped and broken. The viscount sprang from his horse, lifted his sister from the saddle, and leading her up these steps into a panelled hall, with gloomy stained-glass windows, he kissed her on the brow and said,—

"Fair sister, let me be the first to welcome you to your future home, to which you will be so bright an ornament."

Home! The word fell but chilly on Alianora's ears. She returned her brother's embrace, and clung to his arm as she looked timidly about her. All was strange and dark and silent, and she shivered with a premonition of coming ill.

"My father," she faltered at length, "where is he?"

"Hath his lordship yet returned from the palace?" asked the viscount of a servant; and on receiving a reply in the negative, he led Alianora up the slippery stairs, saying as they went,—

"Our father will be here anon, sweet sister, so soon as his duties permit him to leave the presence-chamber. I will lead thee to thine own apartments, which have been made ready for thy reception, and thy woman will attend upon thee. And if thou art not too weary for aught but thy couch, I will bring our sire to thee when he shall have returned hither."

Alianora was in truth weary and sick at heart, but she knew that of present sleep there would be but little chance, so she begged her brother to come again when she had

removed the stains of travel, and had enjoyed a little space of rest, and decided that she would not attempt to sleep till she had seen her father face to face.

The room into which her brother conducted her, through an antechamber adorned with tapestry, was a spacious apartment hung with azure damask fringed with gold. A thick Eastern carpet, such as were now becoming common in the houses of the nobility, covered the floor; the furniture was costly and abundant, and included a harpsichord and set of virginals. A bright fire of sea-coal blazed on the hearth, whilst from silver sconces in the walls softened light was streaming. It was indeed a bower meet for the fair maiden for whom it had been prepared; and Alianora, taken by surprise, uttered a little cry of astonishment and pleasure, which brought a bright smile to the handsome and kindly face of her brother.

"Art pleased, sweet sister? and dost commend thy brother's taste? For to me was left the charge of selecting the lining for our fair song-bird's nest. And here is thy tire-woman, faithful Giles, who will show thee thy bedchamber and relieve thee of this riding-dress; and when thou art something rested and refreshed, I will e'en come to thee again, and bring our father with me. He will not delay much longer."

With a graceful salutation that was full of affection also, the viscount departed, and Alianora was fain to accept the assistance of the woman Giles in the removal of her riding gear, of which, in truth, she was aweary. The dame was a motherly soul, however, and her ministrations, which

were silently offered, were grateful and refreshing to the maiden. The smaller inner chamber to which she was led was, in its own way, as dainty and luxurious as the outer room, and to the country-bred girl there was something almost overpowering in the richness of all she saw. Nor was she less surprised when she stood up at length and caught sight of herself in a Venetian mirror, after her tire-woman had skilfully worked her will upon her person, whilst she had been lost in a deep reverie. Her golden locks were piled up in a mass of curls such as she had seen on no head hitherto, and the open ruff, the jewels sparkling on neck and arms, the wide sweep of the rich farthingale, and the stiff pearl embroidery adorning the under-skirt beneath, gave to her an appearance of such unheard of magnificence that she started in amaze and said,—

"Good dame, and for what occasion am I thus arrayed? I am not to the court to-night?"

"Nay, madam; but you have to meet my lord your worshipful father, and it will not please him an you be not fitly robed. Content you, lady; the whimsies of men folk are past our comprehension—I speak it in no disrespect of my good lord."

Alianora said no more, but passed on into the other room, where a light collation of comfits and cakes and wine had been spread. She felt no disposition for food, but listened with straining ears for any sound from without; and before ten minutes had passed the door opened once again, and her brother entered, followed by an older man, gorgeously apparelled in the height of the fashion,

but with a bearing so full of dignity and pride that he wore his gay garment as if born indeed to such splendour and state.

Alianora looked for one moment with eager wistfulness into her father's face, and then bent her knee for his blessing, and received his salute with passive submission rather than with any sense of real gladness; for in one glance she had read that it was little fatherly love she should receive from him. Those hard, handsome features would never soften to tenderness, and that pair of hawk's eyes would be liker to watch for faults and failings than to rest with benign paternal pleasure on the face of a loved child. And yet she could scarce find fault with the manner of his greeting. He raised her in his arms, and looked her over from head to foot with undisguised satisfaction.

"Aha! methinks we have a treasure here, a bright star that hath wasted its brightness too long in an orbit not its own. How sayst thou, pretty maiden? didst thou dance and sing for joy when bidden to leave thy chrysalis shell, burst thy bonds, and turn into a gay butterfly? I warrant thou hadst no regrets to leave behind. Thou hast been mewed up too long in that worthy yeoman's house."

"I was very happy there, dear sir," answered Alianora gently; "I would fain wish I might be as happy anywhere else."

The Earl laughed heartily, and stealing a glance at the more sympathetic face of his son, he said,—

"Methinks, Lisle, that we shall soon find metal more

attractive in the palace for this young madam than any that she hath left behind. How say you? will she have to pine long in the solitude of her bower?"

And Lisle shook his head, and said, "I trow not, sir;" but his gaze rested with some anxiety upon his sister's face, and he did not appear to enter into his father's levity of mood. But the Earl was no very close observer of his own children. He let Alianora withdraw herself from him, and betook himself to the table, where he sat down and poured out a flagon of wine, inviting his son to do the same; but Lisle declined, having supped already, though his father laughed at the idea of making that an excuse for refusing good wine whenever it was offered him. He laughed still more as he saw him invite his sister to a seat beside the fire and place himself at her side, although his eye could not but dwell with pride upon the handsome pair, who were in all truth fair enough to gladden any parent's eye and heart. It was from their mother that the brother and sister had inherited their chief charm—the soft, lustrous eyes, delicate beauty of colouring, and peculiar sweetness of expression. In Alianora's face it took the character of dreaminess and abstraction, whilst in the viscount's it was all life and brightness and gaiety. But the likeness was without doubt very striking; and Lord Courtland, who had always been very proud of the beauty of his son, now became aware that he had equal cause for satisfaction in the loveliness of his daughter.

"We must not let her be seen too soon, eh, my son? or we shall have her carried off ere she has tasted the sweets

of freedom.—Art pining for the hearts thou art to break, little one? I warrant me thy pretty head is full of plans of conquest. How high does thy ambition soar, my dainty maid? Will an earl content thee? for, by my troth, it would be hard to find a duke for thee: there was such a falling of ducal heads not long since that they have become scarce as nightingales in the north. 'Tis pity now that our *preux chevalier*, Philip Sidney, is wedded to the daughter of Mr. Secretary, or beshrew me but he might well have lost his heart to thee; and a knight with such a face and fair repute is not to be lightly thought on. How now, daughter? dost frown on thy father? Have I said aught amiss?"

"I pray your pardon, sir. I meant no disrespect; but I love not such jests. I would e'en remain as I am—your very dutiful daughter, but wife to no Court gallant. I am young and ignorant, and I wish no change of my state. Be not wroth with me, sweet father; I do but crave to remain thy loving daughter still."

"Not wish to wed, quotha? Marry, thou art a wise damsel, and shalt find favour i' the Queen's eyes," laughed the Earl, who appeared to think there was deep policy in this speech, and for that reason took it in excellent part.—"Hearest thou that, Lisle? This maid would already follow in the steps of her most gracious Majesty, and live and die a maid.—But an her Majesty wed herself, how then, maiden? Thy views must e'en learn to jump with her humour, or thou wilt make a false move where thou thinkest to make a fair one."

Alianora had no such stuff in her thoughts, and the banter distressed and perplexed her. She looked appealingly at her brother, who understood, and rose to make his farewell for the night, drawing his father away with him. He said that she was weary, and would fain seek her couch; and that was true enough, albeit there was little sleep for the tired maiden when her head lay upon the pillow. Her heart was all one lonely cry for "mother," for Ursula, for Humphrey.

And turning again and again in restless weariness, she would murmur their names, as if the very sound soothed her, and pray to Heaven that she might not be wholly sundered from them.

CHAPTER V.

URSULA'S NEW HOME.

"AND now, sweet coz, if you have heart for such pastime after losing yon fair lady, who seemeth more the sister than the friend, I would fain have your eyes and your ears for mine own, whilst I make you acquainted with your new home, which I trust you will be pleased to honour with your presence for many a long day to come."

Ursula turned from the contemplation of the darkening street, down which Alianora and her brother had but recently vanished, and met the smiling glance of her beautiful cousin with an answering smile that was neither forced nor melancholy. Since seeing the viscount, Ursula had been much happier about her companion; and for herself, the homelike atmosphere of the merchant's house, the fact that her brother was with her there, and the interest she could not but take in all the strange sounds and sights around her, drove away the home-sickness she had felt sometimes upon the journey; whilst the entire self-possession of her cousin Constance helped more than anything to put her at her ease.

"I would gladly see all that you can show," she answered, turning indoors with a smile; "but you cannot guess how wonderful a thing a street is to me. Methinks I could watch for ever the passers-by and their strange dresses, and yet not weary of the sight."

"Ay, so felt I when I came home after long absence at the place where I was sent to learn what my mother had failed to teach me ere she died. And gladly will I show you all when morning light comes and the shops are open once again. But now it grows dark, and the good folks are hurrying within their own doors, and the watchman with his dolorous cry, or some young roisterers and swashbucklers reeling home from the taverns, will soon have the streets to themselves. Let me bar the door against them; and then come and see the place we have prepared for your reception. You are the first guest of mine own that I have ever entertained within these walls. It is a new pleasure and a great one, of which I trust I shall show myself worthy."

The house was a strange one to Ursula, used to the freedom and space of the old rambling houses in the country. The ground-floor rooms were piled with bales of rich merchandise of the more costly sort, brought to the merchant's house for greater safety, and because he had private dealings with gay young gallants, who liked to turn over his goods at their ease whilst enjoying a quip and a crank with the ready-witted merchant, who was as popular as his wares. A staircase of dark oak, with shallow, slippery steps, led upwards to the living-

rooms above, of which there was no lack; and the many turns of the staircase, as it led up and up, seemed strange to the girl who had come from a house where there was but one floor over the downstair rooms. On the first floor was the room in which they had taken supper, and beyond that a smaller apartment in which the merchant sat alone with his books and his letters, and transacted business of a private nature. On the other side of the lobby was the room corresponding to the modern drawing-room, or withdrawing-room, as it was then called, only that good Master West permitted no such term to be applied to any apartment in his house, as it seemed to him to ape a rank in life above his own. But though dignified only by the homely title of South Parlour, Ursula stood in the doorway amazed; for in the stamped leather and rich panelling of the walls, the thick Turkey carpet, the Moorish embroideries and piles of silken cushions, in the Venetian mirrors and inlaid cabinets, the embossed silver ornaments and costly velvet hangings, she saw indications of wealth and affluence beyond her wildest dreams, and her face of astonishment and curiosity evoked from Constance a hearty laugh.

"Ah, you know not what wonders have been of late brought hither by travellers and the bold sea-rovers who have opened strange new lands to us. My father's ships are behind none others in bringing home these new and precious wares; and here in this room he places the pick of his treasures, less for the delight of himself and of me than that he may display them advantageously to the

nobles and gentlemen who come to him for counsel in the matter of the plenishing of their lordly dwellings. Why, my Lord of Leicester was here himself, ere he entertained the Queen's Majesty at his great house of Kenilworth on her progress to those parts; and many of the gorgeous draperies and costly jewels, and much of the silver plate, that graced his house then, came from our poor home here. But ne'ertheless this room is thine and mine, to use for our own with all it possesses. I wot we shall pass many happy hours here, for look you, this window overhangs the street, and commands a right good view of all who pass by. It was from here I watched you ride up to-night; and when seated at ease on these cushions with our embroidery or our books, we can have an eye on all that passes below. Yet let us not tarry here now, but come even higher, and see where we lodge you for the night. Your mails have been taken thither, and I doubt not unpacked; and so we will e'en ask my father's blessing, and seek our couches when we have wearied ourselves with talk."

Master West and Humphrey were still conversing earnestly together, and the girls only lingered to give the usual parting salutation for the night, and then made their way up to the story above, where two large and quaint rooms, with long, low, latticed windows, and black-timbered ceilings, opening into each other, were furnished with every luxury of the day, and with far more costliness than anything to which Ursula's past life had accustomed her. Even a small fire burned on the open hearth of the inner room, which was hers; and long did the cousins sit beside

it as they brushed out their hair, and told each other of their past lives, much after the fashion of girls of all centuries. It was wonderful to Ursula how little strange and homesick she felt, and when she sought her couch at length, sleep came to her almost at once, and she only wakened when the strange and unfamiliar cries and sounds of the street below warned her that a new day had dawned, and one that would be very different from any she had known in her former life.

Early hours were the mode even in London, save perhaps with the most fashionable of knights and dames, and even their hours would be deemed most unfashionably early now. The girls were soon up and dressed, and until summoned to breakfast Ursula found it hard to tear herself from the lattice, from whence she could look down into the busy street below; and every moment she was calling Constance to look upon this person or that, to ask what was the meaning of the badge or livery he wore, and to interpret the strange cries that came up from the hucksters, who were chaffering over their wares with the passers-by. It was delightful to hear that she was to be taken a round of the city sights by her brother and uncle, accompanied by Constance; and the good merchant left his customers to his subordinates that day, and gave up his time to the better entertainment of his fair guest.

It was a wonderful day for Ursula, and many were the strange and novel sights she saw. Her uncle's house in Fleet Street was situated in the ward of Farringdon Extra or Without, and her uncle deemed it well to take her first

the round of such places of interest as lay within its boundaries. So she and Humphrey were first conducted to the parish church of St. Sepulchre's, and by Snow Hill and the Conduit as far as the commencement of Oldborne (as Holborn used in those days to be called); after which they visited Smithfield, where an old crone came forward to tell of the burnings she remembered there scarce a quarter of a century ago, whereby she made an honest livelihood from curious sight-seers. And then they turned their attention to the church and hospital of St. Bartholomew, and examined the many monuments there erected to the various benefactors who had enriched the church by their liberality, particularly admiring one fine brass, over a century old, depicting one John Shirley and his wife in pilgrim garb, with the following epitaph beneath them:—

"Beholde how ended is our poore pilgrimage,
Of John Shirley, esquier, with Margaret his wife,
That xii children had together in marriage,
Eight sonnes and foure daughters, withouten strife,
That in honor, nurtur, and labour flowed in fame,
His pen reporteth his lives occupation,
Since Pier his lifetime, John Shirley by name,
Of his degree that was in Brutes Albion,
That in the yeare of grace deceased from hen,
Fourteen hundred winter, and sixe and fiftie,
In the yeare of his age, fourescore and ten,
Of October moneth, the day one and twenty."

The Temple Church and the law buildings were left for another time, and the party returned home for the mid-day dinner, content with such sight-seeing as they had had. Ursula spoke of her promise to visit Lady Mary

Bertie in her house of the Minories, and Humphrey said he should be well pleased to take his sister there that very day, as he was anxious to take the opinion of their late guest upon some points he had been discussing with his uncle the previous day.

Ursula would fain have had Constance's countenance with her on the occasion of her first visit to a strange house; but her uncle interposed kindly but resolutely.

"Nay, nay, good niece, my little girl is but a plain merchant's wench, and has no cause to go putting herself in the way of fine folk, who would look down on her humble birth, and marvel that her father knew not better than to let her put herself forward where she be not wanted. She hath friends and neighbours of her own enow; let her be content with them. She will be none the happier for trying flights for which her wings were never made."

Constance laughed at Ursula's slightly discomfited look, and took her father's words all in good part. She had heard the like from him before, and honoured him for his independent honesty and freedom from pushing ambition. She was happy enough in her home with the friends of her own class approved by him, although it may not be denied that there were brief moments when the wish would enter the girl's heart to see somewhat more of the gay squires and dames who came to the house on business. She could not but know herself beautiful, and her education had been of the best that the times afforded; which was no low standard, far higher, in fact, than it became a century later, when the country was harried by civil

war. But such natural longings were held dutifully in check, though possibly the girl's brow might not have been quite so open or bright had the house to which Ursula invited her company been the abode of the gay young viscount who had sat at their table the previous evening, and whose every word the girl could not but treasure in her heart, although half ashamed of herself for so doing.

"And if you find not the lady, or if she be not wishful to detain you beyond the passing of a few courtesies," remarked the merchant, "belike you might make your way to the artillery-ground in Spital Fields, where will be a muster of the train-bands this afternoon. It is a brave sight for a country lass to see, and 'tis but a short step from the Minories to the place."

By artillery-ground it must be understood, of course, that the merchant spoke of the archery-ground, the word in olden times being used in a different sense from that in which we use it now. And the gathering together and practising of the train-bands had begun the previous year, when the minds of men began to misgive them as to the duration of the term of peace.

Humphrey and his sister were both eager to see all they might of the wonders of the city, and as the merchant had business himself at the Royal Exchange that same afternoon, he declared that they would all go together, as it lay in their route, and that he would show them the fine building which Sir Thomas Gresham's liberality had given to the people of London.

As the party had been on foot earlier in the day, the

horses were ordered for this second expedition; and Ursula, going to her room to make ready for the saddle, found a green cloth riding-dress of the latest mode, laced with gold and with a plumed hat to match, laid out in readiness for her use. Constance smilingly explained that it was her father's whim thus to pleasure himself by gifts to his guests, and that she must wear it for his sake. And indeed the girl became right well the handsome robe thus bestowed. Its colour showed up her clear fair colouring, and the long straight folds gave additional height and stateliness to her graceful form. Master West looked well pleased as he saw her descend the stairs, and turned off her thanks by telling her that it was she who did his poor gift honour in thus condescending to wear it. He ambled at her side upon his own stout nag, and was even a better cicerone of the sights of the city than Lord Lisle had been the previous day. He showed her the Weigh House in Cornhill, whither merchandise from beyond the seas was taken to be weighed under the king's beam, a strong cart and four great horses being kept to carry the wares backwards and forwards. He pointed out the pillory at the corner of Lombard Street, where savage punishments had not ceased to be inflicted from time to time upon culprits of various degree; and then they reached the Exchange itself, and dismounted for a few minutes from their horses, to enter and admire that fine structure, which had been completed just over eleven years.

Sir Thomas Gresham's Bourse, or Royal Exchange as it was called by the Queen, after her visit at the opening of

it, was built in the form of a quadrangular arcade surrounding an open court, the upper galleries of which contained shops in which all manner of rich merchandise was displayed. The merchant showed his niece which of these shops was the one he rented, and told how he and his fellow-merchants had been granted the use of them by Sir Thomas himself, rent free for one year, at the commencement of the undertaking, on the condition that they should be full of rich wares, and illumined by wax candles, on the occasion of her Majesty's opening visit, which took place in the gloomy month of January.

Ursula was so interested by the shifting crowds of busy merchants or fashionable idlers, that she would fain have lingered longer; but Humphrey counselled that they should pursue their way, and the merchant was speedily engrossed by business, and had the less time to give to his guests. So the brother and sister mounted their horses and rode away eastward, passing soon beneath Aldgate, and being directed there to the house in the Minories hard by where the Lady Mary Bertie dwelt.

The Minories were almost in the open country then, and although even in those days the locality had become somewhat unfashionable, the houses were spacious and well-built, and the room into which the guests were ushered was panelled with cedar, quaintly carved, and hung with sombre velvet, somewhat faded, but rich and warm in tone; and along some bookshelves—a sight not often seen in those days—were ranged a number of heavy volumes in rich bindings, one or two of which lay open on the table.

"Methinks the Lady Mary is a student, by the look of this room," said Humphrey; but there was no time for the interchange of many words, for a door behind an arras swung noiselessly open, and their companion of the journey came quickly in with his soldier-like tread, leading by the hand a small and gentle-faced lady, at whose skirt a pretty child was clinging, whilst through the open door two more round, roguish faces peeped stealthily at the strangers.

Ursula's fears of the grand titled lady fled instantly when she encountered the sweet and almost timid glance of Lady Mary's brown eyes. The ceremonious exchange of greetings did not seem stiff or cold to those who were used to them and took them as a matter of course; and in Mr. Bertie's manner there was always something of the soldierly frankness and heartiness which made his guests feel at home and at ease. He was pleased that they had so soon presented themselves, and was quickly engrossed by Humphrey, retiring with him to the far recessed window, and leaving the ladies alone together. But though Ursula would have felt great interest in hearing all that passed between them, knowing it related to her brother's future prospects, she contented herself with the knowledge that he would tell her all when they were alone again, and turned her attention to her gentle hostess, who was making kind inquiries after those at home, whose names she had learned from her husband, and especially for young Lord Beauchamp, in whose clouded life she took deep interest. She told Ursula of the Lady Mary Grey, his aunt, who was for some time an inmate of that very house; when, after

her luckless marriage with Sergeant Porter Keyes, she was kept a kind of prisoner at the Queen's pleasure, and was intrusted to various persons to keep in safe custody, of whom the late Dowager-Duchess Katherine of Suffolk had been one.

"We were like sisters when we lived beneath the same roof, and I mourned her truly when she was taken away some three years since. A hapless house hath been the house of Grey—one sister brought to the block, the other two pining away in captivity, separated from their spouses. I trust a brighter future awaits poor Beauchamp; but he hath known little true happiness yet. His home is no home to him, and he hath been all his life a stranger to parental love."

Ursula had, however, no farther news of the wounded youth, and after hearing all that Lady Mary could tell of him, which was certainly very much in his favour, she asked the names of the little bright-eyed children who kept peeping into the room; and their mother, with a smile that had in it both pleasure and apology, beckoned in the eldest boy, a fine little fellow of eight, bidding him make his best bow to the lady, and ask pardon for his intrusion.

"But, indeed, since my mother-in-law died, I fear me I have accustomed the children to be too much with me. Their grand-dame would not have permitted such cockering; but in my husband's absence I feel lonely in this great house, and their prattle and innocent mirth while away many a weary hour. I love to have them about me;

and this boy is so like his father that I seem never quite alone when he is at my side."

"He is very like him," answered Ursula, looking from one to the other. "And in sooth if he be but eight years old he is a well-grown lad enow."

"Ay, and a scholar too," responded Lady Mary with a fond smile, as pleased and proud to show off her children as any modern mother; for human nature is the same in every place and every age.—"Robert, go bring yon book, and show the lady how thou canst construe a page of Latin.—He is mine own pupil," she added, as the boy went to fetch the volume indicated, "and I fear I am over-proud of him."

Ursula thought the pride in no way misplaced when she heard the little fellow's performance; and since she herself was no mean scholar, as learning went in those days, there was no lack of themes for converse, even though her brother and Mr. Bertie showed no signs of breaking up their interview. And Ursula, who had a real and warm love for children, asked if she might not make acquaintance with the other little folks, who gave signs from time to time of close proximity; and the mother, after a little hesitation, took her into an adjoining room, which was used as a nursery, where the five little ones, after their first shyness was overcome, made fast friends with the pretty stranger lady, and were indulged with a sort of extempore romp, to the delight, though somewhat to the dismay, of the fond mother, who feared her little tyrants were taking liberties.

But Ursula was a true child-lover, and the children knew

it, and acted accordingly, and nothing could have so quickly formed a link between her and gentle Lady Mary as the pleasure taken in the play of the little ones. When after a while the grave-looking nurse came to carry off the children for some exercise in the garden behind the house, the ladies felt as if they had long known each other, and the mother, looking fondly after her retreating darlings, heaved a low sigh, and then glanced with a certain wistfulness at Ursula, who was rearranging hair and dress, which had been somewhat disordered by the clutching hands of the little ones.

It was then that Ursula noted for the first time the look of extreme fragility on the pale cheek of Lady Mary. The excitement of the first meeting with a stranger had given her an unwonted colour during the early part of the interview, which had faded now to a marble pallor; and as Ursula asked with solicitude if her hostess were feeling unwell, she shook her head with a slight smile, and said,—

"Nay, I am ever thus, save at brief moments of excitement. I am but a poor, puling creature, as mine old nurse said of me as a child. It is a sore trouble to me that I cannot accompany my good lord, as other wives may do, when his country's service calls him abroad. It is my part to bide in some quiet place with the children, and I misdoubt me sometimes if I did well to listen to the sweet words of wooing he poured into mine ear when I was but a childish thing of bare seventeen summers."

"Nay, madam," said Ursula eagerly, "say not so. An you saw how each time he named you, when a guest at our poor

house, his face lighted, and he chafed at the delay that held him from you, you would not speak such words. He is a true and loyal gentleman." And there Ursula paused, and broke off blushing; for it seemed to her hardly seemly thus to praise a mere stranger, and that to his own wife. But her rustic frankness did not displease Lady Mary, who pressed her hand and smiled sweetly.

"Gramercy, fair maiden, for such good words," she said; "I am fain to hear my dear lord's praises sung, be the minstrel who he may. Methinks no nobler knight ever drew sword for his Queen or country, and right glad am I to think that he is to succeed to his rightful title, and be called to Parliament and Court as my Lord Willoughby. But even so I fear me I shall do him little credit; for I know not how to face the weary grandeur that falls to the lot of those who go to Court; and yet it must e'en be my hap to make shift to appear there too, else will men say he has a wife he is afraid or ashamed to show at his side. Ah me! we are poor things who are thus slaves to a feeble body. I would I might hide away in some quiet, peaceful spot, and never be seen at any royal palace; but so I should do injustice to my dear lord."

"And methinks, madam, it were a fair sight to see the Queen's Majesty surrounded by her gay Court. And many of those who know her best speak in highest praise of her goodness of heart and kindliness of spirit. I trow she will be no hard mistress to one who is feeble of frame. And it will not be your hap, perhaps, to be one of her own ladies-in-waiting."

Ursula's ideas on the subject of Court appointments were a little vague, and Lady Mary smilingly shook her head; but an idea seemed to enter her mind as she looked at the stately height and bearing of the maiden before her, and she said after a little hesitation,—

"I would, when I pay my *devoirs* to her royal Majesty, that I might have a maiden such as you beside me. Fair Mistress Ursula, if it please you to picture what the Court is like, would it pleasure you to accompany me thither when I must needs go? I have but few friends in this great city, and I would fain know more of one to whom —I know not why—my heart goes out as to a friend." And there Lady Mary herself stopped short, as if she had been betrayed into an unwonted frankness of speech to one who was yet a stranger. Though so warmly had her husband spoken of the Furnival family, and of this girl in particular, that it had hardly seemed as if she were a stranger; and Lady Mary, who in common with many shy and timid people could speak out impulsively in moments of expansion, did sometimes let fall a frank admission, which, however, she seldom regretted afterwards.

Ursula was greatly pleased, and, although she could not give any answer to such a proposal without consulting her own kinsfolk, felt a decided stirring of soul at the idea of being admitted within the magic circle which surrounded the Queen.

When she reached home after her visit had been paid, she infected Constance with a share of her excitement in this prospect; and the city damsel prophesied a bright and

brilliant future for her, whereat Ursula laughed. But something of the glamour of the great city was beginning to fall upon her, as the ambition of winning fame and fortune on the seas was growing upon Humphrey. It seemed as if a spell were cast in a measure upon all who came within the walls that enclosed the mighty beating heart of a growing nation; and instead of shrinking back from anything new or strange, as seems natural to the young and untried, Ursula was beginning to long for wider flights ere she should be recalled to the peaceful seclusion of the old home.

On the morrow, which was Sunday, they all attended the parish church in the morning, but the remainder of the day was passed in something akin to merry-making and joviality. The Queen's court set the fashion, and there were bear-baitings, cock-fights, and feats in wrestling and boxing to be witnessed by all such as craved such highly-spiced amusements. But Ursula, who had been brought up in a more Puritanic code, and who had no love for such cruel sights, remained with her brother at home, a little wearied by the excitements of the past week; and it was then that she heard the results of his conferences both with his uncle and Mr. Bertie.

"The land service under the States is what he counsels," said Humphrey, alluding to the soldier whose house they had visited yesterday,—"not for the present glory it may bring, but because his heart is in the cause, which is truly a noble one; and he looks with some small disfavour upon these ravages by sea whilst war is not declared with

Spain. But mine uncle is all for the sea service, and thereunto my own heart inclines; for if I am to win my Alianora, I must bestir myself as only those can do who serve under such masters as Drake and Hawkins, and who fear not to beard the lion in his den. And when I told him somewhat how it was with me, he smiled and promised to forward my wishes as far as in him lay. And to-morrow he will join our party that is to meet at the new banqueting-hall hard by the Queen's Palace; and there he tells me some of these sea-rovers are like enough to be, as they are ruffling it at Court in high favour with her Majesty. And he will e'en speak for me to them, and put me in the way of their favour. And I have that, besides, that methinks will win me a way with them even surer." And Humphrey smiled and looked both proud and mysterious, and Ursula begged to know what was in his mind.

"It is our good uncle's thought. He would fain see the power of Spain weakened on the seas, and her rich treasure-ships brought home to English ports, and he hath promised that he will fit out a vessel to sail along with those of our naval kings. They talk already of going out with Don Antonio the Bastard of Portugal; and be that as it may, they will not rest idle long on shore. And when they go, I am to sail with them, as second in command of a fair sloop; and if we bring not fame to mine uncle and the Queen's Majesty such as will make my own fortune secure, beshrew me for a poltroon and a coward, and never heed me more."

Humphrey's eyes flashed and his cheek glowed; and Ursula, looking proudly and fondly at him, thought indeed

that he looked like one of those fair-haired sea-kings of the north—the Vikings of the ancient sagas, born to rule on land and ocean.

So the morrow was awaited with impatience by many, none the less so that a scented note to Ursula from Alianora had been brought by one of the Earl's servants, praying them not to fail to be at the Palace gate at a certain hour, as she was pining to see her "sweet sister" again, and thus could they secure a happy hour together.

Constance would fain have been of the party, but the dominie had sent word that he was coming at that hour to rehearse her in her part in the approaching pageant, and her father secretly thought it well that she should not be too much mixed up with young Court gallants, who had turned the simple heads of humble maidens before, and might e'en do so again.

He might have been still better pleased had he seen the look of disappointment upon Lisle's face as he saw that no Constance was of the party. But Humphrey's eyes, and Ursula's likewise, were all for Alianora, and as they passed in at the gateway under the viscount's escort, Humphrey contrived to whisper a few words that brought the vivid crimson mantling in the girl's fair face.

The banqueting-hall in course of erection was on the south side of the palace. It was framed of timber and painted canvas, and was gorgeous to the last degree. The ceiling represented the sky, stars, sunbeams, and clouds, being intermixed with scutcheons of the royal arms; and pendants of fruit and flowers of every kind were hung in

festoons therefrom, profusely sprinkled with gold spangles. Unfinished as the building yet was, it was dazzling in its almost barbaric splendour; and had the girls not been so much engrossed in each other, and the hasty words they could whisper to tell of their well-being in their new surroundings, they would have been lost in wonder and admiration. As it was, they left the gentlemen to do the talking and the admiring. Alianora was whispering to Ursula that her brother was everything that was kind, that her maid was motherly and gentle, and that she had every luxury she could wish for, only that her father was still something of a terror to her, difficult to understand, and of a strange manner of speaking; when suddenly their talk was broken in upon by the sound of many approaching voices and light laughter. The workmen, who could see the entrance, suddenly stood upright, and then fell upon their knees; and the whisper passed from mouth to mouth,—

"The Queen; it is the Queen!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE QUEEN.

THE two girls shrank back almost in affright; Humphrey's plumed hat was doffed in a moment, and he looked questioningly at the viscount, who smiled and seemed by no means put about.

"'Tis but an unpremeditated freak on the part of her Majesty," quoth he. "She will not take it amiss to find us here. We cannot escape now; so stand back in the shadow.—And look, fair sister, should she notice thee, be not afraid. She is like her lion-hearted father for that, and favours most them that answer her with boldness and composure. It may be it will be her humour to pass us by unheeded; or she may call us to join her. There is no telling. Her humours are as the breeze in heaven."

These words were spoken in a rapid undertone, whilst the sound of laughing voices drew nearer. In a moment the little *cortége* passed through the gilded archway and entered the vast hall, and Ursula's gaze became riveted for the first time in her life upon the face and form of the great Queen of England.

It was a face that once seen would never be forgotten.

Ursula never paused to analyse the individual features, or to feel disappointment in lineaments which had been extolled by the most famous poet of the day in terms of highest eulogy. The brilliant and extraordinary power of the eyes, the majesty of the carriage, and the regal air which bespoke her every inch a queen, gave dignity to the sharp, thin features, and height to the small, slim figure, and the impression invariably carried away was one of admiration not unmingled with awe.

Always sumptuous in her apparel, the Queen, even in undress, was a glittering object to look upon. She wore a large close ruff of exquisite cut-work, into which her pointed chin sank deeply, but which was more becoming to her than the more recent fashion of open ruffs, exposing the neck after the modern mode of square-cut gowns; her dress was of crimson velvet, slashed with white satin, and stiff with an embroidery of seed-pearls; and the under-petticoat and the dainty high-heeled shoes were also of white satin, with the same rich garniture. A small coronet upon the curled head supported the weight of a flowing veil, and the hands were encased in delicately perfumed gloves, adorned with rich embroidery and crimson silken tassels.

She was surrounded by a little knot of richly-dressed gentlemen, to whom she was talking in the high, sharp tones she habitually affected, whilst a few ladies-in-waiting followed silently behind. As the little procession moved onwards, the Queen pausing to speak in condescending accents to the working-men, who blessed her as she passed,

the viscount in rapid whispers told his companions who the courtiers were surrounding the person of her Majesty.

"See you, yon tall bulky man with the foam-white curly beard falling over his ruff, and the jewelled orders about his neck, he is my Lord of Leicester, ever the nearest to the royal presence; and that gay popinjay ruffling in silk and velvet and feathers is Christopher Hatton, who entered the Queen's favour by a galliard. But better worthy of your regards, methinks, fair ladies, are the twain that walk a little behind, for in them you see two of the brightest ornaments of chivalry and of the Court—Philip Sidney, and his sworn comrade Fulke Greville, two very proper knights, the pride and joy of the Court, albeit not always in such high favour with the Queen's Majesty as those who are less deserving of her good pleasure."

Ursula, eagerly interested, turned her gaze upon these two men, of the former of whom she had heard so much even in her far-off country home; and what she saw fully equalled her expectations, for there was that in Philip Sidney's face that won him love and admiration wherever he went. In figure he was tall, and of singularly graceful proportions, and though dressed with the finished perfection of the most fastidious courtier, he yet avoided the smallest appearance of frippery and effeminacy, such as was displayed by Hatton in such marked degree. He looked younger than his five-and-twenty years, with his delicate Anglo-Norman features, a singularly sweet smile, blue eyes, and a mass of amber-coloured hair. His cheek was smooth as a girl's, and a faint silken moustache of pale

gold adorned his upper lip. On his brow was the stamp of intellect, and the earnest eyes were often full of dreamy fire, as if the Muse burned hot within.

His friend Greville was of sturdier build: a handsome, knightly man, dark-eyed and dark-haired, with a happy mingling of the courtier and the soldier in his aspect. He was a greater favourite with the Queen than Sidney, whose personality somehow was never quite successful in pleasing the royal lady whose praises he sang so sweetly.

Ursula had the more time to study the faces of these two from the fact that the Queen had paused to watch the skilful handicraft of some gilders at their work, whilst Greville and Sidney had turned back to welcome the approach of Peregrine Bertie and a bronzed, bearded gallant who accompanied him, and who had just paused in doubt at the doorway, seeing how the hall was tenanted, and uncertain of the propriety of advancing. From the familiar way in which Sidney laid his hand on Bertie's shoulder and entered into eager talk with him, it was plain they were friends of long standing; and when the Queen turned away and caught sight of the new-comers, she extended her hand with condescending grace and said,—

"Ha, my Lord Willoughby of Eresby, an I mistake not —come to take possession of his new dignities. How goes it with you, my lord? And what tidings bring you from our good cousin the Prince of Orange? for methinks you have had audience of him of late."

Bertie (or Willoughby, as it will now be more correct to

call him) approached with doffed hat, and knelt to kiss the hand extended to him.

"Excellent well with your humble servant, gracious lady, since the light of your Majesty's countenance hath fallen upon him. As for the noble prince, he is still full of lofty courage; and could he hope that he would receive succour from your Majesty in such sort as his needs demand, he would indeed rejoice, and see the speedy end of this long and weary struggle."

For a moment a look of annoyance flitted over the Queen's face. She was in a vacillating mood as to her policy as regards the States, and liked not reminders of their sore need. A more finished courtier than Willoughby would not have spoken so frankly; but the frown on the royal brow was smoothed away as the Queen turned to the other of the pair and gave him her hand to kiss.

"Ha, my sea-rover, is it you? And, by my troth, you have come at a good hour, when we have escaped from the cares of state, and the sour looks of my Lord Treasurer and Mr. Secretary, who would fain make our life but a sorry burden. The one is laid by the heels with the gout, as cross as a bear with a sore head, and the other is penning despatches to the Ambassadors, thanking Heaven the uncertainty is over at last." And there came a look of vivid amusement into the eyes of the maiden Queen which boded ill for the success of this treaty matrimonial, had any been there to interpret it aright. And it seemed as if Sidney did read its meaning, for he turned a look of congratulation on Greville, which was responded to by a

gesture of assent. For it was well known that Sidney disliked and distrusted the French alliance, and when asked his opinion by the Queen a short time back, had had the courage to write her a very frank and noble letter of remonstrance, which she had taken in good part. He had now resigned himself to the inevitable (as some called it), and was even about to take a prominent part in the coming tourney; but his aversion remained unchanged, and he still trusted that there would be some slip 'twixt cup and lip. Greville, who was a prime favourite amongst the maids of honour, declared that the Queen would never wed any man, least of all such a bandy-legged, ill-favoured little monstrosity as the Duke of Alençon and Anjou; but since the Ambassadors had been summoned with the marriage treaty, things seemed all tending that way in real earnest.

Meanwhile, the Queen, still talking to Drake (for the bronzed, burly sailor was none other than he), had made a half-circuit of the great hall, and was now very near to the little group, who remained stationary in an embrasure, watching and listening, but keeping closely in the background.

The keen eye of the Queen, sweeping round as she moved, caught sight of this small knot, and took in at once the stately height and lofty bearing of Humphrey and his sister, and the fragile loveliness of Alianora. Nothing pleased her better than beauty; and being fully possessed of the royal faculty for remembering faces, she knew at once that three out of the four standing together there were

strangers to her and to the Court, albeit the fourth was well known.

"Ha, my young viscount—my Spanish Nightingale—methought thou hadst spread thy wings for a southern flight. We have missed thee from our side these past three nights. Hast found metal more attractive than the presence-chamber of thine old Queen?"

Lisle stepped forward with all the grace of a finished courtier, and knelt at the Queen's feet.

"Nay, gracious lady, that could never be. Yet even the eagle is forced at times to turn his dazzled eyes from the sun's rays, in which he loves to dwell; to say naught of the younger eaglet, who is but learning to support that life-giving radiance. In truth, gracious Majesty, I have been no willing absentee: but I have been in attendance on my young sister, who hath but just left the seclusion of a country home, in answer to your Majesty's summons to Court; and all is so strange to her in this great city, that I have felt loath to leave her to solitude to which she is little used."

The Queen's glance turned upon the two girls, who instinctively bent the knee, as did Humphrey also. Alianora was covered with confusion at thus becoming the object of public attention, and Ursula trembled somewhat with a nervous excitement to which she had hitherto been a stranger; but the viscount answered with easy confidence the questions put to him by the Queen, and led forth Alianora to kiss the royal hand, extended with a smile of kindly pity at the girl's visible confusion and surprise.

"This maiden is my sister, an't please your grace. Yon other is not of our kindred, albeit she hath been as a sister to our Alianora these many years. Mistress Ursula Furnival is her name"—this in answer to another question—"and yon gallant at her side is her brother, come to seek his fortune by doing service to your Majesty in what way seemeth best."

The Queen's glance turned from one to the other, and a moment's silence followed, in which she seemed to muse.

"Furnival—Furnival—methinks the name is somewhat familiar to us. Tell me, young sir, hath one of your kindred ever been at Court? We have that in our mind which eludes us, and yet seemeth to say that the name hath not been unheard before."

"May it please your Grace," said Humphrey, who had not lost his presence of mind, and was beginning to feel able to answer both the gaze and the speech of royalty—"may it please your Grace, I had an uncle of that name long years gone by, who roved the seas, and returned laden with treasure and with fair jewels, many of which he was honoured by permission to present to your Majesty in person. He never was at Court, seeing that he was but a hardy sailor; yet he once saw your Majesty face to face, and in our house is yet preserved the rose which you held in your royal hand whilst you spoke with him, and which he made bold to beg from you in token of the grace you had done him in thus granting him speech of you. He prized it more than all the spoil he had taken from the Spaniards or found in the Indies."

The Queen turned smilingly to her courtiers.

"In sooth a right loyal gentleman—I call him now to mind—of the height of this fine stripling here, but without his grace of bearing or smooth fair cheek and yellow locks. Well spoke, young sir; it ever rejoices our heart to meet our loyal subjects, come they in what guise they may. And so you have come to seek your fortune like the rest of the world? How would it pleasure you to enter my service as one of my gentleman pensioners? Would that be service good enough for you?"

Humphrey bowed low in acknowledgment of the royal favour, but perhaps he hardly knew how great was the grace thus shown him, for his answer raised a smile amongst the courtiers standing round, some of whom nevertheless admired him the more for his independence and his courage—though possibly it was the courage of ignorance.

"May it please your Grace, I would fain serve your Majesty in any way that I may best do it. Yet it seemeth to me that on land there is but little need of more strong arms and loyal hearts than already surround the throne. I would fain follow the steps of mine uncle, and come with spoils to lay at your Grace's feet. Means have been furnished me to fit out a vessel for that service, and I would have somewhat besides my poor sword to offer to your royal Majesty, in token that the Furnivals never forget what is due from them to their Queen."

And the bold speech pleased the Queen in her present mood, though at another time she might have taken um-

brage at having her favours declined so bluntly. In her heart of hearts she delighted in her bold sea-rovers, though there were times when she felt angry with them for embroiling her in trouble with Spain, and more times when, for State reasons, she had to affect displeasure at their exploits, and call them the acts of pirates and robbers. But to-day, when neither Burghley nor Walsingham was at her side to frown down her natural impulses, she felt free to say what she would, and there was certainly nothing the Virgin Queen liked better than the choice jewels and rare treasures the bold mariners brought from far-off lands to lay at her feet.

So she gave a gracious answer to Humphrey; spoke kindly to both the maidens—told Alianora that she should look to see her soon at Court, and would give her a post amongst her maids of honour; and with a keen look at the beautiful Ursula, demanded,—

"And you, my maiden, what are we to do for you? Have you come hither to remain still with this damsel as heretofore? Methinks you would grace our bevy of fair maidens right well. Say, will you join them when this sweet lady is added to their muster?"

Ursula knew not what to say. This was the last thing that had ever occurred to her to expect; and it was but one of those rare chances, utterly unlooked for, that could have brought about such an invitation from royalty. But the Queen was in one of her most expansive and gracious moods. She was pleased with the bearing and appearance of the Furnival brother and sister, and at this moment

was anxious to surround herself with the fairest women her kingdom could boast, in order to do honour and pleasure to the French Ambassadors, who were reputed to be judges on such matters. Viscount Lisle was one of her great favourites just now, his sweet singing and skill upon the guitar having won for him the *sobriquet* of "Spanish Nightingale," by which she was pleased to designate him. Alianora, as his sister and the daughter of the Earl of Courtland, would come to court as a matter of course; and why not this fair and stately girl likewise, who, if not noble, came of a good, loyal, Protestant family —such a family as helped to form the bulwark of the State against the insidious attacks of the many foes within and without now threatening the peace of the realm?

Lord Lisle caught Ursula's look of perplexity and doubt, and Alianora's of eager hope and expectancy, and he good-naturedly took upon himself the task of answering for the girl.

"May it please your grace to let Mistress Ursula first consult her parents, who are far away from here, and await their answer before saying yea or nay? There was no thought in their hearts that such an honour would be vouchsafed, and the maiden knows not their mind upon the subject. She hath but come to visit for a time with a relative of hers in the city—not as the companion of my sister."

"So be it then, good wench," answered the Queen with careless good-nature. "Since thy brother will have none of my service, we will e'en pass the offer unto thee. But

thou doest right to ask permission of thy parents. We would obedience were more the rule of the day than it is like to be."

"Gracious madam," began Humphrey, distressed at the charge, and speaking with an eager energy that brought a smile to the faces of the courtiers, though it did not displease the Queen, "I meant no such treason as that would be in—"

"Oh, content you, content you, boy," said she laughing, her eyes resting with real kindliness upon the handsome youth, who was struggling to find courtly phrases in which to clothe his honest meaning, "I did but jest with thee. Thou art a mettlesome cockerel, and I would I had more of thy likes, readier with true service than with smooth words. Ay, go thy own way; belike thou wilt serve me best so.—And now that we are thus bent on thoughts of the sea, I would fain pay my promised visit to thy good ship the *Pelican*, Master Drake. Have I not promised to see her ere she spreads her wings for another flight? and if so, what time better than the present, when I have escaped from my stern jailers, who would fain teach me to call thee pirate, and hold me back from any purpose which seemeth to lend my countenance to what thou hast done?"

The bronzed face of the sailor lighted up at these words, yet he began to disclaim somewhat.

"I have naught in readiness for your Majesty—" he began; but she stopped him with a light laugh.

"Better so, better so. I would fain throw off the

trammels of royalty for a few brief hours. Think not that it is the Queen of England thou art to entertain to-day, but only some simple guest, who would fain see the good ship that brought home so rich a prize.—What say you, gentlemen? Shall we please our fancy by this speedy visit? Methinks it must be speedy, else will Mr. Secretary get inkling of it, and come down with his long face to take all the mirth away.—And you, young sir, who are bent on the rover's life, come you likewise and see how a Queen can take pleasure in her simple sailors, and bring yon maid with you, an she fears not the water.—As for thee, my Nightingale, thou shalt make music for us as we float down in our barge; and thy sister shall be placed beneath the care of good Mistress Blanche Parry, who will tell her of her future duties, and make her at home in them ere she is called upon to take her place in the presence-chamber.—Run, boy," she added to an attendant page, "and bid them bring our barge to the stairs.—My Lord Willoughby, will you join us? I would hear more of your mission to the Provinces, albeit we know not what course we must take, and would fain not be troubled by business this day."

On seeing that the Queen had really made up her mind to a trip to his ship the *Pelican*, now lying at Deptford, Francis Drake hurried away to take the fastest wherry he could command, and make some sort of scant preparation for the reception of her Majesty. He had prayed her many times to visit his vessel, and a little later on she went thither in state, and knighted him ere the day was out; but this

was simply a sudden whim on her part to secure herself a few hours of the easy freedom from publicity so much valued by sovereigns, and by none less than Elizabeth, who enjoyed a freak of this kind with almost girlish pleasure.

As for Ursula and Alianora, they felt as if about to be embarked upon some voyage into fairyland. After the first few moments the Queen ceased to notice them, handing them over, as it were, to the care of her ladies, one of whom was the aged and devoted Blanche Parry, now over seventy years of age, the head amongst the maidens of honour, and devoted to the Queen's service. She received Alianora with kindness and motherly words of comfort and reassurance, touched by the girl's great beauty, and pitying her for her visible timidity and shrinking shyness, likely to be sorely tried by the life of the Court. In another lady Ursula found a sister of Lady Mary's — a younger and gayer lady, but gracious and pleasant of speech as soon as she heard how her new companion had seen her sister only the day but one previously, and had travelled to town under the escort of Lord Willoughby. So when the Queen's barge was in readiness at the stairs, and the company had taken their seats, Ursula found herself comfortably placed between Alianora and Lady Alicia de Vere, at some distance from the Queen, who preferred to be surrounded by her gentlemen, and was carrying on half-a-dozen conversations at once, in the gay, bantering fashion of which she was perfect mistress.

The viscount had his guitar by this time, and beguiled

the way by many a sweet song, one of which was his own setting to some lines lately written by the rising poet Shakespeare :—

"Mine eye and heart are at a mortal war,
How to divide the conquest of thy sight:
Mine eye my heart thy picture's sight would bar,
My heart mine eye the freedom of that right.
My heart doth plead that thou in him dost lie,
(A closet never pierc'd with crystal eyes,)
But the defendant doth that plea deny,
And says in him thy fair appearance lies.
To 'cide this title is impannelled
A quest of thoughts, all tenants to the heart:
And by their verdict is determined
The clear eye's moiety, and the dear heart's part:
As thus: mine eye's due is thine outward part,
And my heart's right thine inward love of heart."

The Queen, to whom a compliment never came amiss, was pleased with this ditty. "A fair song, and fairly sung," said she with a gracious smile, as the last sweet notes died away. Then Sidney was called upon for one of the poems he wrote with such a happy knack; and Greville himself, no tyro in the art of graceful verse, had his mite ready to add to the general entertainment: and the Queen, lying back amid her cushions, listened to the honeyed homage of her gallants with a pleased smile upon her lips, and for a wonder heeded not that her faithful Leicester had wandered from her side, and was deep in converse with the group of maids of honour some twelve paces away.

In truth the great Earl of Leicester never got over his love of a pretty face; and although, since the death of the ill-fated Anne (or as she is generally known, Amy) Robsart,

he had twice contracted marriage with the widows of the nobility, he kept his wives in the background, and let all his outward homage be for the Queen; though by no means averse to passing pretty nothings with her ladies, and in this instance much struck by the fair face and fragile beauty of the Lady Alianora.

For her own part she did not like these advances, and hardly gave him more than a monosyllable in reply. There was little of the courtly grace of the young Lord Robert Dudley in this portly Earl, with the red face and ear-rings, and all the frippery of the most extravagant age of dress. She was thankful to Mistress Blanche for answering his questions herself for the most part, and much relieved when, as the barge neared Deptford, the Earl was recalled by a quick glance from the hawk's eye of his mistress, and she was left to the more gentle and truly courteous attendance of Sidney, who gave her his hand up the side of the vessel, and constituted himself her cavalier during the hour that followed.

The reception on board the *Pelican*, if not what it would have been had the commander had more time to prepare, was at least much to his credit considering how he had been taken by surprise. The deck was spread with a rich carpet; there were flags flying from every yard. An awning had hastily been erected, beneath which was a table spread with many choice dainties, and the sailors were drawn up in line to salute their Queen, and fire a salvo in her honour. The battered ship which had brought home such rich treasure was in herself an

object of no small interest, and Humphrey, with his friend Lord Willoughby, who cared less to hang about the royal visitor than to cull information for themselves, asked of the sailors all they could tell respecting their recent voyage and the prospect of the roving life upon the sea; and the more he heard the more Humphrey's heart swelled within him, and he longed for her Majesty's visit to be concluded, that he might linger with the bold commander, and hear fuller details of his adventures and the life he was about himself to take up.

But Drake had his hands full at this moment with the entertainment of his royal mistress. He knew better than to let her go away empty-handed, and after she had deigned to partake of some of the dainties hastily set forth, he approached her on bended knee with the offering in the shape of a wondrous fan, which is thus described by the chroniclers of those days: "A fan of feathers, white and red, enamelled with a half-moon of mother-of-pearl; within that a half-moon garnished with sparks of diamonds, and a few seed-pearls on the one side—having her Majesty's picture within it, and on the reverse a device with a crown over it."

This gift having been graciously accepted, and the Queen having distributed small pieces of money to the sailors, with some friendly words such as none knew better than she how to speak, the company prepared to embark once again, and Humphrey sought Ursula's side to ask if she could wait with him, for that he wished above all things to have an interview alone with Master Drake, and no

time seemed so good as the present, so soon as the Queen should have departed.

The viscount, hearing this, declared that he would be responsible for Mistress Ursula, and see her safe home to her own door. Alianora would be affrighted at being deprived of her companion's society, and yet it would be a pity for him to miss such an opportunity. Willoughby also offered his escort to Mistress Ursula; and Humphrey, thus relieved of the care of his sister, felt able to pursue his own inquiries where they would be best answered and most quickly.

Drake was a blunt, bluff, hearty seaman of no gentle birth, but so valiant a man and so clever a navigator that he had won himself a reputation of being all but invincible. He took the same liking to Humphrey that most men did, the free, frank bearing and good looks of the youth being by no means thrown away upon him. He told him plainly that he would have gladly had him in his own vessel had there been any chance of a speedy voyage for him; but with a shrug of the shoulders he explained that he thought it doubtful if he sailed again that year himself at all, or Hawkins either. For the Queen was growing afraid of the magnitude of their exploits, and could not assume the same ignorance of their doings as she could those of smaller men. One day she would bid them sail, and the next she would send down to stop them from acting on her orders, and there was no knowing how it would end. So Drake advised Humphrey, if he really meant business, to fit out his own sloop quietly and without attracting notice, and

go to sea on his own account, or else in company with a few smaller sailing-masters, whose movements would not be closely inquired into.

Humphrey, though disappointed at not going under the direction of Drake himself, was pleased with this counsel, which jumped with his own humour right well. But he objected that he knew not enough of such matters to be his own captain, and must even find a man of experience to take command. Could Master Drake help him to such a one? Drake scratched his head and pondered.

"Methinks I know the very man, could I tell where to lay hands upon him; but he is the veriest wanderer on the face of the earth, here to-day and gone to-morrow,—yet a notable sailor none the less, and one who has had as much luck as often falls to the lot of any one man. Last time I set eyes on him it seemed to me that he and his ship must soon part company, so warped were her planks, so riddled her masts with the shots of the many encounters she has been through. Belike it would please him well to join company with a young gallant like thee.—His name? Why, his name is Gammage. What! dost thou know him then, lad?"

"Nay, I know him not, and yet methinks I should; for verily I believe he is mine own uncle, my mother's sister's husband. Tell me, is this same Captain Gammage a Welshman? And know you if he holds estates in Glamorganshire, which by all I know bring but little grist to the mill, as the saying is, so that their owner first went beyond

the seas to gain wealth enow to live upon his lands when he should be old and gray-headed?"

"Ay, ay, that is the man. I have heard him speak ere now of his broad lands and old house falling to decay. But that is on the way to be mended now; for the very last time I was in his company he told me that another successful voyage would make him rich for life, and that he meant to give up his roving habits and settle down upon his land, making his house a fit bower for his little daughter and only child, whom he had not seen these many years. Thou smilest, young sir; knowest thou the maid?"

"Ay, marry do I—as mine own sister. She was born in our house, and there she hath stayed ever since under the care of our mother. She knows naught of her father save what she receives from him in the way of strange ornaments and rich apparel, which arrive from time to time to tell her he is yet alive. 'Twill be passing strange if I set sail in his company. Methinks it would please mine own kinsfolk right well."

"And you could not better him for knowledge of the seas and boldness of enterprise. Men speak well of me, for that I have brought home rich spoil; yet had this Gammage been in my place, he would have done to the full as well. I will make inquiries as to his whereabouts, and communicate with you anon. Let me know where you lodge. I will pleasure myself by waiting upon you some day there."

Humphrey thanked the sailor warmly, and, as the day

was by that time waning, allowed himself to be put ashore by the ship's boat, and made his way back to his uncle's house in the Fleet, greatly elated at having taken the first definite step towards the accomplishment of his dream. He was certain that his parents would be the better reconciled to his hazard if it were shared and directed by a kinsman; and when he spoke to his uncle about the Welshman and his capabilities, he learned that Gammage was reckoned a brave and skilful sailor, albeit somewhat reckless in his moods. This last attribute, however, did not daunt Humphrey, who had all the impetuosity and daring of youth; and in his fair cousin Constance he found an ardent sympathizer with his ambitious wishes, the maiden declaring it was very hard that girls could not go out to share the peril and the glory which were always attainable by men. She was greatly excited by the story of the wonderful meeting with the Queen that day, and the notice she had vouchsafed to the two Furnivals; and in the privacy of her own room a few sighs were expended as she thought of the looks bent on her by Lord Lisle when he had brought Ursula home, whilst for almost the first time in her life she felt it hard that she had been born in a sphere which would for ever shut her out from the bright world which was open to him, and which seemed about to open before her cousin likewise. Had not the viscount asked Ursula to visit his sister in her own apartments the very next day? and had not the invitation included herself also? Was it not a little hard that her father's notions of propriety were so strict that he would never

listen to such invitations, but laughed and bid her bide at home and learn her speech to the Queen.

When Ursula, at the appointed time, was taken by Humphrey to the mansion of the Earl of Courtland to pay the promised visit to Alianora, it chanced that the viscount was in the court-yard, and seeing perhaps something of the reluctance with which Humphrey turned away, he good-naturedly suggested that he too should pay his *devoirs* to the lady, and tell them what had chanced after they had left him on board the *Pelican*. Humphrey's face lighted, for every moment passed with Alianora was doubly precious now that meetings were rare and time was short; and the viscount, hearing that his sister was in the river-garden, took his guests through the house and out upon a terrace overlooking the great river, where the barges and wherries were plying up and down, and the pleasant lap of the water against the stones made a not unfamiliar murmur to the ears of those brought up by the side of running water.

Alianora sprang up from the stone bench where she was sitting and dreaming, and ran to Ursula with a little cry of pleasure. As she saw the tall form of Humphrey behind his sister, her colour deepened in her cheeks, and in the eagerness of the meeting Lord Lisle was forgotten, and presently moved away, leaving the three to themselves, a little smile of amusement curving the corners of his lips.

"Blows the wind in that quarter?" he said to himself as he withdrew. "Then indeed I fear there are storms ahead for thee, sweet sister, ere thou mayest make any sure haven. All the more cause why they should enjoy

the calm of the present. I will keep ward over the garden, lest my lord return suddenly and find them there. It were well he had no suspicion, else might he hurry on some match of his own. I fear there are troubles in store for thee, Alianora; but I will stand thy friend through all."

Storms might indeed be rising in the horizon of their sky, but for the present moment all was sunshine round the lovers. Alianora sat between Humphrey and Ursula, and her hand lay trustingly in his, as he talked to her of his plans and his hopes, and painted in vivid colours the future as it rose before his mind's eye, when he should come back laden with riches and honours, and should claim her as his bride before the world.

And Alianora drank in every glowing word, and would not be dismayed even by the long parting, or by the vague, dark cloud of her own presentiments with regard to her lover's voyage. She tried to think it all fancy, and rest secure in his love. The thought that he would not be there helped to reconcile her to the knowledge that Wyndgate Manor was no longer her home; and if she had but Ursula's countenance and companionship at Court, she began to feel that life might be not only tolerable but even happy. So far her father had shown himself kind, and her brother tender and affectionate. She loved the latter dearly, and was ready with all dutiful submission to the former. Her home, though lonely, was not unhappy, and her music and her books were comrades with whose company she was quite content.

And so they sat and talked of present, past, and future,

and when at last Humphrey rose and held her in his arms for a long, last embrace—for it was possible they might not meet again ere he sailed, so uncertain was he as to his movements—she felt that that kiss and the certainty of his unchanging love would keep her brave and even happy, come what might in the future. So with smiles and fond promises they parted, and vowed unchanging fidelity the one to the other, be the days of parting long or short.

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE SWEET SPRING-TIDE.

IT was a bright, hot day in April, and moreover one of those old-fashioned Aprils of which we of the nineteenth century read with longing and regret: for in those days the terrible snow-falls and tremendous frosts of winter were amply atoned for by the heat and brightness of the months that followed. The hawthorn was in bloom on May-day, the cherries had been known to be fit to gather ere that day arrived, and in ordinary seasons hung from the trees in green clusters to ripen in the course of the month. Our changing climate has given us greater equality of temperature, and a milder, softer winter; but it denies to us the delights of those early summer days of which we read so much, when summer began ere April showers had passed, and there was small fear that the May-day holiday would be spoiled by cutting east wind, or by storm of driving sleet and hail.

And the garden of Wyndgate Manor was a sweet place in this bright, hot spring-tide. Roses bloomed beneath its walls in all their first profusion—the York and Lancaster with its striped petals, the sweet old cabbage as we call

it, than which no other rose has ever been more fragrant: the newly-imported Flemish rose of Providence; together with the musk-rose and damask-rose, both of them somewhat new to the country. The shady pleasaunce beyond the rose-garden was fragrant with the breath of the thorn trees, which grew there in abundance; the apple-trees were full of bloom; whilst the bees, all awake from their long winter sleep, were humming amongst the flowers with heavy, drowsy murmur. The birds were singing with that glad joyousness they seem to keep for spring, and spring alone, and the voices of the trees and the water made a music that was as good as any lullaby, and sounded passing sweet to the ears of one listener who had for many long, weary weeks been shut up between the walls of a sick-room, unable to hear or see any of the sweet sounds and sights of nature, save such snatches as came to him through the narrow latticed window.

Beneath a gnarled old apple-tree, through whose pink and white blossoms the sunlight came straying and dancing in tricksy fashion, stood an oaken settle, well padded with cushions, and upon this comfortable couch, wrapped in a warm bear-skin rug, lay young Lord Beauchamp, whose white, hollow face, transparent hands, and sunken, lustrous eyes, told an eloquent tale of recent and severe illness, from which indeed he had only just recovered so far as to be considered out of reach of danger.

Blood-poisoning in these days of medical science is sufficiently serious, and was far more so three centuries ago, when so little could be known as to its pathology. Had

Beauchamp been in the hands of a country leech, he would have been long ago in his grave; but the tender and skilful nursing of Mrs. Furnival—her determination to let nature alone, and only aid her efforts by the application of soothing medicinal herbs of known value—her quiet resolution to have no further blood-letting, but to support the patient's strength by light and nourishing food, had in the end proved her wisdom and foresight; and the lad, long given up by those who favoured the methods of the age, was now slowly recovering, and to-day for the first time had been permitted, at his own earnest request, to be carried out of doors to breathe the free air of heaven, and look at scenes upon which he lately thought his eyes would soon close for ever.

So he lay in this green, pleasant place, and looked about him with that sense of wonder and delight that only those can know who have been long deprived of their liberty. And yet, lovely as all was about him, his eyes were ever straying back to the figure at his side—the figure of a slight and graceful girl clad in a simple white smock (a garment not unlike in make to the smock-frocks of country men of to-day, and worn in warm weather by country maidens on ordinary occasions), the dainty lace ruff and a girdle of golden silk being the only adornments, save the bunch of roses fastened to one shoulder. The girl's head was bent over some fine embroidery which she held in her hands, and the sunlight played upon her dusky hair, and lay in golden drops upon her lap and swiftly-moving white fingers. A spaniel lay at her feet, blinking up at her with

loving brown eyes, and ever and anon she would pause in her task to pat his head or cast a smiling look upon her companion; but they did not talk, for she thought him quite sufficiently fatigued by the effort of being dressed and taken out, and the very silence between them, which was disconcerting to neither, showed how very far advanced was the intimacy between the pair.

Honora's face, always of lily fairness, was even more pale than its wont, and there were shadows beneath her eyes which looked as if they had been caused either by fatigue of body or anxiety of mind. But to-day her face was full of brightness, and seemed to reflect the dimpling sunlight that played upon it. Beauchamp lay watching the outline of the delicate, sensitive features, set in rings and tendrils of the wavy hair that clustered round brow and neck in such caressing fashion, and the light deepened in his liquid eyes as he lay, and when the girl paused at length in her task and looked full at him, there was something in his face that made her drop her eyes once more, though she spoke naturally and with a smile.

"Methought you were perchance asleep, you lay so still and silent. I hoped this soft music of the trees would lull you to repose, for it is but little you sleep at night, I fear me."

"Nay, I am learning to mend my ways in respect of sleep," he answered with a smile, "and you know not how fair and sweet all around is to one who hath not looked on it this many a week. Many have been the hours when I have told myself that I had looked my last on this world,

and thought too that it was better so—that it were a happier and better thing for such as I to die than live."

But a troubled look stole into Honora's face, and she said quickly,—

"Ah, say not so; why should that be? May there not be happiness in life for you as well as for another?"

He looked at her half eagerly, half sadly.

"I would I could think that, fair Mistress Honora. Yet I fear me I was born beneath the unlucky planet of our house, and that mine will ever be a troubled and a luckless life."

The girl looked at him with something of tender reproof in her clear gaze.

"In sooth, my lord," she said with grave directness, "I would not have you speak thus. Have we not learned better in these Christian days than to put faith in those superstitions anent stars and horoscopes which deluded the pagan world of old? Have we not learned to put our trust in God, and look to Him to help us in our hour of trial and danger? Know you not that prayer was offered for you in our parish church whilst you lay even hard at death's door; and if it hath pleased the good God to restore you to life and health, why say it had been better for you to die? Methinks it sounds like ingratitude to Him, or e'en a lack of faith; for doth not He know best what is good for each one of us?"

A new light leaped into the eyes of the youth.

"Sweet Mistress Honora, I crave your pardon for my words, which were but ill-judged and ill-spoken. If old

habit breeds in me a kind of distrust of the future, I will learn to banish it at your word. And in truth I fain would live, and learn to taste the happiness I have dreamed of but never known. And I needs must value the life that hath been spared, since now I owe it to you, sweet lady, and rejoice to think I take it as a gift at your hands."

Honora's face crimsoned quickly, and as quickly grew pale. She bent her head over her work, and her fingers moved rapidly.

"Nay, my lord, you do me too much honour. Such poor service as I was able to perform was as nothing compared with that of my good aunt. I did but work under her direction, as hath ever been the way since she was pleased to tell me I had an apt gift for tending on the sick. Talk not as if it were I rather than she."

"I do but talk as my mind and memory prompt. It seemeth to me, looking back over those dreary weeks of pain, that it was thy soft hands that ever brought relief; thy sweet voice that soothed me as none other sound had power to do; thy healing touch that eased my pain, and drove away all other thought save the sweetness of being so tended. Nay, fair maiden, turn not away from the poor words of thanks I fain would offer. It cannot but be sweet to me to owe to thee this worthless life. I would that it might be spent in thy sweet service from this time forward, so long as this heart continues to beat."

Honora's head was bent yet lower; her work lay unheeded in her lap. Her cheek was a vivid crimson, and she dared not look up.

"Oh, good my lord," she faltered, "I pray you speak not so. It were not well for me to listen. I am no courtly damsel to answer thee in like strain. I have no words—"

But Beauchamp suddenly sat upright, throwing off some of his wrappings in his excitement, the colour coming back to his face and the light to his eyes, as he saw something in the girl's face, or heard it in the tones of her voice, which suddenly turned a vague, sweet hope into something tangible and almost fierce in its intensity. Yet for a moment more he held himself firmly in hand, and checked the burning words that were trembling on his lips.

"Sweet Mistress Honora," he said in tones of studied gentleness that were infinitely eloquent to her, "if you bid me be silent, I will henceforth be mute. It were well perchance that I should ever be so; that I should learn the lesson that I am not as other men; and that my life must ever be lived alone, lest any that I love may be drawn into the troubled shadow which hangs upon my steps, and may haunt me to my life's end."

"Nay, nay, say not so, my lord, say not so," cried Honora in stifled accents. "It cannot—it must not be. Why should there not be happiness in store for you as well as for others? Have you and yours not borne enough? Oh, speak not of trouble more! I cannot bear to hear you."

"Dost thou then care for what concerneth me?" asked Beauchamp, in a voice that quivered with emotion. "Hast thou a thought to spare for one for whom there would be few tears shed had the grave indeed closed over his head? Honora—sweetest mistress—are those crystal drops shed

indeed for me, and for the troubles I have endured? Nay! then none need shed another tear for me, come what may in the future; for I too have known happiness, I too have loved—"

But the sentence was not destined to be finished. Beauchamp had indeed made a step forward, had possessed himself of one of the girl's hands, which was not unwillingly surrendered, whilst for a moment she had lifted her dewy glance to his, and their eyes had met in one eloquent, ardent gaze, speaking far more fully than any words could do, when the sound of hastening footsteps from the house warned them that their privacy was at an end; and Beauchamp had but time to regain his couch, upon which he dropped, pale and trembling with excitement and emotion, before Barbara dashed up in a fever of importance.

"Now, verily, but I am right. Said I not that thou wouldest be found here? Honora, thou art wanted in haste within doors, for thy father hath but this moment arrived. His horse yet standeth at the door. I tarried not to ask what tidings he brought, but hurried off to find thee, and speed thee on thy way. He asketh for thee right impatiently. Nay, leave thy tangled thread and run; I will put it right for thee."

Honora hastened off, her face in a glow that did not surprise the sharp-eyed Barbara, though she did not divine its cause, being intent on her own intelligence, which was sufficient to account for any excitement on the part of her cousin. She sank down laughing into Honora's place, and

commenced unravelling the tangled skein, whilst Beauchamp asked questions with as unembarrassed an air as he could assume.

"Hath Sir Richard come to take away his daughter?"

"I know not, yet methinks it will end so, after that he hath tarried a few days here. It is but a matter of a score or so of miles away that his dwelling lies. Mayhap I shall go thither with her, an he take her hence. It hath been promised these many years that I should be her companion on one of these visits to her own home."

"And where dwelleth Sir Richard?"

"Marry, at Brianstone, in the county of Dorset; but he is often long months at a time away, and thus comes it that he leaves Honora here with us. But he is a fond father, and loves her right well, and methinks he would fain have her with him always, if he could in any wise compass it. I always fear each time he comes that it will be to carry the maid away from us altogether."

Beauchamp's face clouded somewhat, but he spoke quietly.

"Surely no father can hope long to keep so sweet a maid with him. Doth he not fear that there will come one, ere long, who will rob his nest of its treasure?"

Barbara gave him a quick, keen look that sent the blood into his pale cheek, and on seeing that blush she discreetly withdrew her eyes, although a mischievous smile curved the corners of her lips.

"I know not how that may be, my lord. Our Honora is of age to wed, and her father, for aught we know, may

have a bridegroom ready and waiting for her. You start at that, but so it may well be. He hath come here in haste and without warning. May it not be that he comes to carry his daughter away to celebrate her nuptials with some bold soldier or gay gallant? Is she not worthy of a noble mate?"

But Beauchamp stirred restlessly, and rose to his feet, as if inaction had become intolerable to him. Barbara's sharp eyes took all this in, and she repented of her teasing words.

"Nay, fair sir, I did but jest," she said. "There is no soothfast word in what I said. Our Uncle Rogers is not one to wed his daughter without her own consent; nor is our Honora one to give that assent unless her heart hath been won." And the merry maiden stole a glance at Beauchamp, which again brought the bright colour to his cheek.

"Fair Mistress Barbara," he began, and then paused and hesitated. There is always a great deal of unconscious freemasonry between young things thrown together and dwelling beneath the same roof, and the illness of the youth had brought him into contact with the girls in a way that would not otherwise have been the case. Barbara was far too keen-sighted and quick-witted not to have guessed Beauchamp's secret long ago; and the romantic story of the young man had won for him the loyal interest and good-will of every person in the hospitable Furnival household. Barbara loved a little romance, and as she had nothing of the kind of her own on hand, she was the more willing to throw herself heart and soul into that of her

beloved Honora. Bess would have been a thought too deliberate, downright, and possibly conscientious for the office of confidante to such a secret, but Barbara had inherited some of the reckless impulsiveness of the house of Gammage, and she had no scruples to hold her back.

"Fair sir," she responded, mimicking his hesitancy; and then breaking into her merry laugh she said, "Think you that we are all hooded falcons, who are blinded from seeing what passeth beneath their very eyes? Nay, but frown not; I mean well by you and by her. Do I not know how she sat weeping in her window two live-long nights when they said that you could not live? Do I not love her —ay, as mine own sister? And will I not do all that in me lies to compass her happiness? Fear me not, and trust me, for I will be your friend. But methinks you will need prudence and patience, for you know better than I can do that there may be some peril in such an alliance, albeit the peril grows less with each year, and there is hardly a faction left who would not put the King of Scots first, and the little Lady Arbell next after her Majesty, failing direct heirs."

Beauchamp, only too glad of a safe confidante to whom he could pour out his lover-raptures (for he was not quite twenty, and very much in love), gave rein to his tongue, and told Barbara how that he had loved Honora almost from the first moment of their meeting, and how her sweet presence in his sick-chamber seemed the only link that bound him to life—the only thing which made the thought of life sweet to him. He confessed that he

had almost revealed the truth to her that very day, but that no actual confession had passed between them; and at that Barbara nodded her head, and said it were better so. To understand each other would be enough for the present, and it were wiser not to go too far ere they learned her father's mind in the matter. He was a loving parent and upright, generously-disposed man, and might not be averse to the match if he saw Honora's heart were set on it. But patience had best be observed in the present; and Barbara promised all her help and countenance, as well as all the diplomacy of which her clever little head was capable.

Much cheered by this interview, and strengthened by the hope which was springing in his breast, Beauchamp declared himself sufficiently recovered to reach the house alone, or with the aid of Barbara's shoulder, which was offered as a crutch. The walk to the house was successfully accomplished, and there in the great hall was the new guest, Sir Richard Rogers, who had by this time heard the story of Lord Beauchamp's residence there, and addressed him with words of kindliness and welcome.

He had come with the intention of passing a week or two with his kinsfolk at the Manor, and was uncertain of his movements after that. He had some thought of returning home with his daughter, but was not certain of doing so, and meantime he had come at a favourable moment for witnessing the May-day festivities, which in these rural parts were celebrated with great gusto.

It was a pretty sight to watch the adornment of the

great hall of the Manor-house with birch boughs and other greenery, by the youths and maidens of the house, on the eve of the gay May-day. And perhaps it was watching the quiet corner where Honora was at work, with Beauchamp as her faithful assistant, that first suggested a thought to the father's mind which brought a pucker of anxiety to his brow. It was hard to find a fault with the modest bearing of his fair child, or with the graceful deference of the handsome youth, who, despite his weakness, strove to enter the family circle, and lay aside the habits of sickness. There was something very attractive in the gentle and silent lad, whose melancholy story seemed somehow to be written in those dark, lustrous eyes, so haunting in their expression. Sir Richard was half fascinated himself, yet would fain keep his judgment intact; and as he found that Beauchamp had so won his way with all as to be almost regarded as a son of the house, he wondered if he had not better remove Honora from the peril of those appealing glances; and once he spoke, though in a half-jesting manner, to his sister-in-law upon that very subject, for he had the greatest faith in her judgment, and in the soundness of her discrimination.

It was as the merry-making was at its height in the great meadow of the Manor-house that this conversation took place. The May-pole, which had been dragged that morning from the woods by thirty yoke of oxen, all decked with garlands of flowers, and with posies tied to their horns, had been set up in the centre of the meadow; and the milkmaids had footed their clever dance with the

pyramid of borrowed silver plate and tankards on their heads, and had danced off to the neighbouring houses to ask their small gratuities there. Now there were merry sports being held around it—sports such as we see no more upon our village greens. In one of the large empty barns the procession was forming that, with Robin Hood, Maid Marian, Friar Tuck, and bold Little John at its head, would soon emerge and make the circuit of the meadow, amidst the shouts of the people, the sound of such music as the rustics could produce, and the general delight of all onlookers. After that there would be a great supper in the large hall for the tenants and labourers employed by Mr. Furnival, and for as many of his own friends as cared to be present at the rather uproarious style of feast then in vogue at such times. The day would end with the health to the Queen and confusion to her enemies, and the people be dismissed before they had lost all control of themselves, as they did in places where there was no authority to interpose limits upon the length of the repast or the depth of the potations.

May-day had been one of the great days of the year ever since the children could remember aught, and Barbara and Bess, under the protection of their tall brother Ivo and the stripling Gilbert, were footing it merrily on the green in some quaint country dance. But Honora was not to be seen amongst the gay throng about the dancing-ring, and Sir Richard's eyes sought her long ere they found her. It was not amid the merry-makers she was seen, but wandering beside the mill stream that ran beneath

the meadow; and her companion was no brother, but wore the gay dress and moved with the languid air that characterized young Beauchamp. He had so far recovered as to be able to be present at some of the pastimes of the day, but it was not without visible effort, and not entirely with the approval of Mrs. Furnival, who, however, had not been able altogether to resist his pleading. She was not sorry herself to see him thus retiring from the stir and noise of the dancing and games, and knew that in Honora's company he would be safe and well looked after; but the glance she met from Sir Roger's eyes, half smiling, half anxious, and altogether questioning, suggested an idea new to her, and for a moment she was taken by surprise.

"Beshrew me, good sister, but it seemeth as if yon sick lad knew how to use his time to good purpose. Here is he scarce on his legs again before he must needs cast those soft eyes of his at my little maid. By good hap small harm can have been done in these few hours since he was up and about again; but I misdoubt me that I had better take the lassie home with me sooner than I had meant. I would not give her an hour's pain an I could save it her, and there is something about the lad that is like enough to win a young maid's heart ere she knows that it hath left her own keeping."

Good Mrs. Furnival looked more disturbed than was her wont. She cast a glance at the pair now disappearing from view in the copse, and then turned to her brother-in-law with a grave face.

"Mean you that you think the child hath taken harm by aught that hath passed betwixt them?"

"Nay, I did but jest, seeing them wandering so lover-like together. And I have noted a shade more of serious gravity and absence of mind in my maid than I have found in her before, though naught to rouse my fears. How now, good sister? you look discomposed. But hearts are not won in a day nor an hour—not such hearts as thou hast had the training of—and the young lord hath but two days left his room, they say. No great mischief can have been brewed so far."

"Would you call it mischief if the young things loved each other?" asked Mrs. Furnival with hesitancy in her tones.

He looked at her in surprise, and then a more serious expression crossed his face.

"I mean naught against the lad himself. I judge well of him, and I pity him from my heart; yet I would not willingly mate my little girl with one of his lineage. I need not call to thy remembrance the hapless fate of brides of that same house."

"Such days as that are gone, good brother," began Mrs. Furnival eagerly; but he smiled as he replied,—

"Ay, dame, I trust so; but the spirit and the mood of her Grace is not to be trusted, nor the movement of the times foreseen, which brings strange changes to light. Mean you by this that you have seen somewhat which leads you to suppose it be thus with my maid?"

"Nay, I have had no such thoughts; and yet I fear I am

to blame in the matter. He came to us at a time when there was much stirring in the house, and my little Honora hath ever been the skilfullest of all with the sick; and so it fell that first with me, and then with only our good old nurse, the main tendance of the youth fell upon her. Thus I know not what may have passed; and yet I deemed them but boy and girl together. I pray your pardon if I have judged amiss. It is hard to know when one's children cease to be such, and the sweet maid hath ever been like one of mine own."

"That I know well," he answered kindly; "and never can I thank thee as I would for all thou hast been to my motherless child. Thou callest her yet a child, and speakest so of her; and yet methinks she is something more than that now. Many girls are made wedded wives long ere they reach her age. And young hearts are ever wont to go out something sooner than those which have been seasoned by time. So my maid hath been in attendance upon this young gallant in his sickness?"

"Ay, verily; I would not deceive you. It began when it seemed no more than the dressing of a sword-thrust that would be healed in a few days, and Honora hath the light hand and gentle touch which have made her for long my best helper in such like offices. And then it fell out that my Lord Courtland sent for his daughter in haste to the court; and eftsoons, as thou hast heard, my husband and I resolved to send Ursula to her uncle's; then Humphrey needs must go too; and so with one thing following on another—"

"Ay, ay, good sister—I see well how it might chance, and small blame to thee either. Nor do I know that harm hath been done, and a passing fancy for one who hath been tended by such fair hands may easily be pardoned in the lad, whilst the maid will soon learn to forget him when she is taken away. I mean not to make a coil about the matter unless we haply find there is cause. But if it be thy good pleasure we will follow them now. It might be well they were not thrown too much alone together."

Mrs. Furnival agreed, and the pair sauntered on in the same direction as the young people, the good dame pondering in her mind the events of the past weeks, and wondering if indeed her fair niece had taken a more tender interest in Lord Beauchamp than she had suspected. It was true that she had been something graver and more thoughtful of late, and that her spinning-wheel had stood idle, whilst she was dreaming with her mind far away from her task; yet the mother had connected these musing fits rather with the changes in the household than with the guest lying sick in his chamber; and it had become such a matter of course that Honora should help in the dressing of wounds or the care of a sick person that she had thought nothing of her presence in the room where the patient lay.

Now, however, she felt a little self-reproach, and yet she had learned to feel so mother-like and tender towards Beauchamp that it hurt her to hear a word in his disfavour. She would have given a daughter of her own to him without a fear or a qualm, for she did not think the Queen would now heed any alliance he might make, and

she loved him tenderly for his own sake. But she saw that Sir Richard, who knew the world better, would be against the match; and if so, it were kinder to the young things themselves to prevent the mischief that was so like to arise. Honora's head was full of romance, and her heart was the more disposed towards Beauchamp on account of the cloud that had hung over him, and was likely to hang longer; whilst she was herself so very fair and sweet that it would be small wonder if the lad, little used to kindliness and gentleness, should learn to love her ere he knew it. Was it not Honora's voice that seemed to reach his senses when no other sound penetrated the cloud of delirium? And did he not lie still when she unbound his arm and dressed the wound, when he could brook no other touch but hers?

"Have I been blind?" asked the good woman of herself in some anxiety, but she knew not how to answer her own question.

They had not far to go to find the truants. Beauchamp's powers of walking were limited, and as soon as the pair had reached the safe shelter of the little copse, they had seated themselves upon a fallen tree, and were talking together in low tones, whilst the girl held in her hand a bunch of forget-me-nots, upon which her eyes were bent, as she listened to the words of her companion. However, there was nothing of shame and consciousness in the face she raised towards her father and aunt, as they appeared through the trees, and the only reproof uttered by them was one addressed to Beauchamp for over-exerting himself,

as his changing colour and shortened breath seemed to show that he had done.

"And thou art losing all the merriment, Honora," added Mrs. Furnival, with a glance at the girl, daintily arrayed in her holiday kirtle of white and pink, with little buckled shoes that seemed to speak of dancing. "See, child, thy father will take thee to join the rest, and I will bring this truant more slowly home. He will have no mind to tread a measure this day. He must wait for Midsummer-eve ere he will be able to foot it on the green."

Beauchamp looked up eagerly in the face of his hostess as she spoke these words; and as Honora and her father disappeared through the trees, he asked eagerly,—

"Mean you, sweet madam, that I may hope to share your Midsummer revels, as I have done these of May-day? It were almost too much to hope for, and yet—and yet—"

"If you be still in these parts, gentle sir, we will gladly bid you welcome," answered Mrs. Furnival kindly. "Be he friend or stranger, he is never turned away from Wyndgate Manor without a hearty welcome who comes on such a day. And in sooth we shall needs be glad of all friendly faces to swell our ranks, for methinks they are like to dwindle fast. Our Honora will be the next to go, and methinks she will scarce be content without stealing Barbara at least for a time from us. It is strange how when change once entereth a house to take one thence, he never stoppeth till he hath scattered right and left. Our Bess will scarce know herself left thus alone; yet it is but the course of the world, and we must not complain."

"Mistress Honora leaves you then?" faltered Beauchamp, with ebbing colour and an anxious look.

"Ay, verily, so I believe. Her father will need her, now that for a spell he may command his own time."

"But she will return anon?"

"Nay, that I know not; it is hard to read the future. Were she but a child I should believe it truly, but she is of an age to be wooed and won ere ever she come back to us again."

Beauchamp made no response, and whether it was fatigue or emotion which gave him that look of exhaustion Mrs. Furnival could not say, but she saw that he could bear no more fatigue that night, and was glad the house was nigh at hand.

As they trod the path towards it the master came striding to meet them.

"Why, wife, I have been looking for thee this half-hour and more. I would have thee by my side when I visit yon tent, where the hinds are making merry. Methinks they have had enough of huff-cap and mead, and had best be dismissed to their homes. Those who have been astir since midnight will be none the worse for seeking their couches ere daylight be gone. And then we will bid our own guests to the hall, and give them their fill of good cheer."

Seeing that Honora was safely engaged in one of the interminable country dances, Mrs. Furnival was willing to leave her charge, bidding him go straight to his couch to rest; and she and her husband made their way to a great

tent of rude construction, wherein such of the hinds as were scarce of degree to feast in the hall—which, indeed, large though it was, would not contain the whole of the merry-makers—were enjoying a plentiful meal provided by the hospitality of the lord of the Manor. Joviality and abundance of noise seemed to characterize this company, and as the master and mistress approached they heard the words of a favourite song being trolled forth from a lusty pair of lungs :—

> "Good bread, and good drink, a good fire in the hall;
> Brawn, pudding, and sauce, and good mustard withal;
> Beef, mutton, and pork, shred pies of the best;
> Pig, veal, goose, and capon, and turkey well drest;
> Cheese, apples, and nuts, jolly carols to hear,
> As then in the country is counted good cheer."

The song was received with acclamation, and if all the dainties named therein were not found upon the tables, at least there was no lack of good food and good ale; and when Mr. Furnival and his wife appeared to speak a few kind words and dismiss their guests, they found the board cleared, and every one in a jovial and happy mood. Hearty cheers for the master and mistress closed the day's proceedings, and with one more toast to the next merry meeting the humble company broke up and dispersed.

The dancing on the meadow green now came to a conclusion, the company streamed into the great hall, and the day concluded by a banquet which, if somewhat rustic in its setting, was enjoyed by those who partook of it as few state banquets can claim to be. Mrs. Furnival was so fully occupied with attending to her guests,

and seeing that the serving-men and wenches did their work aright, that she had no more leisure to heed Honora, or her wistful looks at a certain empty place near to the upper end of the table; and if her father saw, he held his peace, for he did not think the time had come when open speech would be needed. He hoped by care and watchfulness to avoid the necessity of thwarting his daughter's desires, and went about busily to lock the stable door after the steed was stolen.

CHAPTER VIII.

ROYAL PAGEANTS.

"YOU ought to break a lance for the Queen in the coming tourney, good Humphrey. You would look right well mounted on some grand charger, and would find favour in her sight, as you did before. The smile of royalty is not to be lightly prized, young sir. An you will be advised by one who knows the Court, you will e'en enter the lists, and rank as one of the champions in defence of the Castle of Perfect Beauty, which will be assailed by the Mount of Desire and its four stalwart knights."

It was the viscount who gave this piece of advice to Humphrey, as he sat once again at the board of the hospitable merchant, and paid some courtly homage from time to time to the radiant Constance. He had spent a long hour below with the merchant, looking at his richest stuffs with a view to his own adornment in the coming pageant; and he had lingered so long that good Master West had once again offered him a place at his table, and the offer had been promptly accepted. It was supposed by the unsuspecting merchant that Humphrey's presence in the

house, or that of the fair Ursula, was the attraction, and the few compliments paid by the young gallant to his daughter seemed but the small change current in the world from whence he came. Indeed the viscount had much to say to his sister's friends, and was very well disposed towards Humphrey, who had a knack of gaining both affection and a certain kind of respect and admiration; and he was really anxious that this new friend should make an impression on his royal mistress which would not be readily effaced; for if in truth Alianora loved him, nothing would tell so greatly in his favour with Lord Courtland as the fact that he had been noticed and smiled on by the Queen.

But Humphrey's mind was fuller of matters connected with rope, cordage, and sail-cloth than of knightly display of prowess, and he shook his head with a smile.

"Nay, I have no skill in such like shows. I am no carpet knight to foot it featly in mock warfare. If her Majesty needs a strong arm and a loyal heart in any manner of real service, let her command me for life or death; but of these graceful mummeries I know naught. I should but seem like an uncouth bear in the midst of the knightly ring. Let me meet her enemies face to face, and I will show fight to the best of my poor power; but I will leave the tilt and tourney to those who have been bred up to it."

"Well said, my downright cousin!" laughed the viscount, who was pleased to make the most of the very distant kinship which had long ago existed between his

mother's family and that of Mrs. Furnival. "I would her Grace could hear such words; but yet methinks you judge not well. She took a mighty liking for you that other day, and showed you marvellous great favour, such as many of our best born youths would have swelled with pride to receive. And it seemeth to me but a fitting mark of homage that you should appear in the lists as one of her defenders, albeit but in mock warfare. For, look you, if you chance to win her smile that day, she will see that you remember the debt you owe, whilst you have given your pledge that in true warfare you will ever be loyal and true.—How think you, fair ladies? Would it not be well for this gallant to break a lance for his Queen? Beshrew me if he make not a brave show in the lists. And it is well known how her Majesty favours them of tall stature and shapely form.—You will be a very Hercules amongst some of those gay young butterflies flitting round the throne."

"Ay, Humphrey, be persuaded," cried Constance coaxingly. "Why shouldst thou not show thy prowess as well as the other gentlemen? I know, were I in thy place, I would not need a second summons.—Sweet father, tell him what he ought to do. He will be advised by thee, I trow."

"In sooth, Humphrey," said the merchant, "I think my lord speaks well. You owe our liege lady somewhat of service for the favour she did you when she deigned to notice you. If it pleases her to see her subjects of all degrees tilting before her, I see not why you should

despise such service, for it is held in high esteem by the flower of our English chivalry."

Humphrey laughed and disclaimed, saying he meant no such thing as scorn to the knightly sport, but that he himself was unpractised in the art, and had no fit apparel in which to appear, and not much time in which to see to such matters; but his uncle once more interposed.

"Content you, boy; your furbishing forth shall be my care—you need give yourself no trouble anent such matter; and as for the rest, no doubt my Lord Lisle can tell you where you can be practised in the sport of the tilt-yard."

"Ay, marry can I. Why, in our court-yard there is an empty hall where in past days such sports have been held. An thou wilt be my pupil for a brace of hours each day, Humphrey, I warrant thou shalt do me no discredit on the occasion of the tourney. And thou wilt make a proper knight, in all truth, when good Master West hath furnished thy trappings. I dare be sworn thou wilt put into the shade many who will erst have thought themselves right royally accoutred."

The merchant laughed, not ill pleased by the implied compliment, and Constance fairly clapped her hands.

"I would I could be there to see thee, Humphrey. 'Twill be a gallant sight.—I pray you tell me, my lord, what is this Palace or Castle of Perfect Beauty of which all men are talking who come from the Court? and how is it to be attacked, and by whom?"

"The Castle of Perfect Beauty, fair Mistress Constance,

is that end of the hall where our gracious lady will be enthroned, and she is to be summoned to surrender to Desire—by which is meant the French duke, call him Alençon or Anjou, which you will. On her refusal, a mount is to be wheeled into the hall, and four of our knightliest gentlemen will ride in beside it, with their attendant men-at-arms, all superbly accoutred, to force the submission refused."

"And who may the champions be for the duke?"

"My Lord of Arundel, Lord Windsor, and those two ornaments of the Court, Sidney and Greville. There will be speeches enow, all prepared by our good poet John Lilly, whose style is in such high favour at the Court just now. When many speeches have been recited, the attack will be commenced by the firing of two cannon, the one charged with sweet powder and the other with sweet water; after which there will be flower-decked scaling-ladders brought and reared against the wall, and a plentiful flinging of flowers, till that the defendants come riding in to the succour of her Majesty; and then will be a brave show of tilting, which will last two days or more, till the challengers lay down their arms in token of submission."

The girls listened eagerly to all this, and Constance turned again to Humphrey.

"You will not now refuse to be one of the brave defenders of the throne? I would that I were a man, and I would break a lance right willingly at so gay a tourney. —And you, fair sir, you will also be numbered amongst her

Majesty's defenders, I trow. Or will you be in the train of them that follow Desire's knights?"

"Nay; I am numbered with the defendants of the Queen's Majesty, and would have Humphrey at my side.—So you will come to me, good cousin, to be instructed in the art, since you are not practised in it? And you must e'en share the lessons I give my sweet sister in her 'Euphues,' in which she is wofully badly instructed—saving your presence, fair Mistress Ursula—for in these days a lady at court who cannot make shift to parley Euphuism is as little thought on as she who plays not lute or virginals, or is unskilful with her needle. She must needs shape her lips to his stilted phrases, else she will be laughed at and flouted as a rustic maid of no repute."

It was one of the curious fashions of the court in those days to quote freely from Lilly's "Romance," in two parts —"Euphues, the Anatomy of Wit," and "Euphues and his England"—and to model the style of speech upon that of the author, with all its quaint conceits and odd affectations. To adopt such phraseology was looked upon as a proof of refinement, and the good-natured viscount was instilling into Alianora's mind some of the best-known quotations and most-favoured phrases, that she might not appear altogether ignorant when called upon to appear at Court, as was shortly to be the case.

Great was now the excitement in the merchant's house over the part Humphrey was to play in the approaching pageant; and he, entering into the spirit of the thing, was indefatigable in his attendance at the great hall, where he

was instructed in the art of tilting, which was new to him, but which he acquired with wonderful rapidity and ease, partly from his constant habit of being in the saddle, partly from the natural aptitude of one whose muscles are well under control, and who has learned steadiness of hand, quickness of eye, and coolness of judgment, even when action is most rapid. Lord Lisle was delighted with his pupil, and none the less so when shortly before the appointed day he rode into the hall mounted upon a coal-black charger of such magnificent proportions and fineness of breeding that the viscount stood lost in admiration. Humphrey explained that his uncle had that day made him a present of the creature, suggesting that, as Humphrey was shortly going to sea, and would no longer need a steed to carry him, he should offer the beautiful animal for the acceptance of the Queen, who would shortly be starting on one of her royal progresses, and enjoyed nothing so much as a day in the saddle, with a good horse beneath her, that could gratify her by a day's hunting.

"By my troth, Humphrey, I would I had such an uncle as yours. He is a born courtier in mind, albeit his life is spent amongst his bales of merchandise. He knows that her Majesty liketh nothing so well as a costly gift gracefully given; and she knows the value of a horse as well as ever did her royal father. Your fortune will be made an you go on in this like. I would you had elected to remain at the Court. You are too good a man to lose from its precincts."

"Nay, I was never made for a courtier," answered

Humphrey, smiling; and then a graver look coming over his face, he looked at the viscount earnestly and said,—"Do you but jest with me in bandying such compliments, as is the fashion in these parts? or think you in all seriousness that I may one day hope to rise to some post of honour—or at least receive some grace at her Majesty's hands which may—which might—"

"Which might make thee a fit aspirant for the hand of an earl's daughter, wouldest thou say?" questioned Lisle with a smile; and seeing Humphrey's start of surprise and almost of dismay, he added, a very soft and sweet seriousness coming over his face, "Nay, never be afraid of me, good cousin, or dismayed that I have read thy secret. I have learned more of it from my sweet sister than from thee, and I would fain bid thee hope. Yet it is but a soothfast word I tell thee in saying that as matters stand with thee at this moment, thou wouldest never gain a hearing from my father for thy suit. His heart is filled with pride at the beauty of his daughter, and lordly dreams of advancement through her marriage are flitting before his eyes. It were better thou shouldest hold thy peace for the nonce, and see what hap thou hast on the seas. The Queen's smiles have fallen on thee, and thou hast made no bad beginning. Yet it is so far a beginning merely, and must needs be followed up by something somewhat more substantial. The smiles of royalty are sweet, but they form but poor food to live upon, and our gracious Majesty smiles upon too many gallant and proper youths for them all to hope for wealth and place."

"I hope for nothing but what I may win myself by mine own merit and desert," said Humphrey somewhat hotly; but seeing the smile on Lisle's face, he laughed at his own impulsive pride, and added,—"I meant no despite to your kindly counsel, my lord, and I thank you truly for your fair words. I know full well that I cannot hope as yet to raise my eyes so high. Yet hearts cannot be bound by the fetters which keep our fortunes in thrall, and in sooth I think the maid loveth me, as I had learned to love her ere I had skill to speak my thoughts. And now I must leave her alone in this strange place—leave her to the smiles of others. And belike they will ask her hand in marriage, for methinks to see is to love her; and if some gay suitor comes to beg her favour, what answer will your noble father be like to give?"

Lisle was looking grave and thoughtful.

"My father would doubtless give favourable ear to any man with wealth and lands and noble blood; but the maid would be less easily won if it be with her as we both think. And yet she is but young, and has seen naught of the world as yet. Maids have changed their minds before now. If that be so, good Humphrey, what of thy hopes and thy bold purpose?"

But no cloud crossed Humphrey's face as he made his manly answer.

"If she inclines to any other suitor, then let her not think more of me. I resign her willingly; for never could I bear to look upon that sweet face more an it had changed towards me. Had I all the gold of the Indies at

my back I would not ask her hand in marriage had her heart been given elsewhere. But what I fear—the load that weighs me down as I think on it—is that she may be urged and forced into reluctant wedlock whilst her heart is yet mine. And when I think on that my blood boils within me, and—God forgive me if such thought is sin—I feel I could slay with mine own hand any man that thus falsely stands betwixt me and her."

Lisle looked up into the set face of the stalwart youth, and saw a new expression in those steady blue eyes, which showed him that the quiet Humphrey was no stranger to the fiercer passions of love and hate, albeit of so calm an exterior at ordinary times. He liked him none the less for this outburst of feeling, and thought his father might well seek far and wide ere he found a truer heart or nobler mien than were possessed by this young man. After a brief space spent in musing, he made answer gravely though gaily,—

"A truce to such fierce words, good Humphrey; we talk not of killing, save in honest warfare with the Queen's foes. But as thou hast given me thy confidence, I will not prove unworthy of the trust, and I here give thee my word of knightly faith to do all that lies in my power to defend my sister from that same loveless wedlock which thou, not without reason, fearest for her. I know my father, and can play upon his moods as Alianora hath no art to do; and methinks he loveth me, in his own silent way, as he loves no other being under the sun. I pledge myself to do all in my power to protect her from this thing, and only if

I see her affections going out towards any other suitor will I leave her to settle her own fate as she listeth."

Humphrey's eyes lighted with gratitude, and he grasped the viscount's hand in a warm clasp, pouring out broken words of thanks; but he was not long listened to by the kindly youth.

"Tush, good cousin, it is but little grace I do thee, and I would do the same for Alianora's sake were there no thought of thee in her mind. But I may not have the same power as I have the will to serve you; and I may chance to be far away at some crisis of her fate, and then small good can I do her, be the trouble what it may. The best I could hope to accomplish in that case would be to send her home to thy good mother, for whom methinks she yet sheds nightly tears when alone in her chamber."

That was the best comfort Humphrey could have had, and although no more passed between him and Lord Lisle on the subject, he knew that the brother did not forget, that Alianora would have one champion to do battle for her, and that the best that could be found. It was plain to all eyes how greatly the Earl loved his son, and in all minor matters Lisle could do with him what he would. How he would fare when Alianora's fate came to be put to the touch only time could show, but Humphrey hoped for the best, and was able to face the future with greater comfort and courage.

The approaching tourney, or triumph as it was commonly called, was in the thoughts and on the tongues of all the world just now. Alianora was to make her first ap-

pearance then in the train of the Queen's maids of honour and Ursula would also be there, but as the companion and attendant of Lady Willoughby, who was likewise to be present, as her husband, having now assumed his new title and honours, had been invited by Sidney and Greville to follow in their train as one of the attacking force.

And to her unspeakable delight Constance found that she too, after all, was to witness the gallant show of arms; for one spacious gallery had been reserved for spectators of humbler degree—after the well-known and pleasant condescension of the Queen towards her loyal citizen subjects—and to this gallery Master West and his daughter were bidden, and from it they witnessed the brave sights that were long the talk and the pride of the whole town.

And in truth it was a spectacle gorgeous in the extreme, even for those days of gorgeous festivals. The Queen's gallery appeared to blaze with gems as the ladies took their seats, and the flashing of diamonds and rubies upon the person of her Majesty was a sight not to be forgotten by any who saw it. The Queen was looking her very best that day, and as she bowed and smiled her thanks to the assembled crowds, who made the roof ring with their shouts of welcome, and cheered her to the echo, it seemed indeed a right noble thing to be tilting in defence of so royal a princess. And although the adulation of the day might be pitched in somewhat too high a key for modern taste, there was that in the attributes and in the mien of the princely woman before them that was better than the oft-vaunted perfect beauty; and if she was plentifully

endowed with her mother's vanity of person, she shared in no small degree the strong nature and keen statesmanship of her great father.

It were wearisome to describe in full those gallant feats of arms, wearisome even to read descriptions of so many marvellous costumes, yet one must needs tell of the gallant Sir Philip Sidney in his richly-gilded armour; his train of pages in cloth of silver, Venetian hose, and laced hats; his gentlemen-at-arms on richly-caparisoned steeds in trappings of cloth of gold, pearl-embroidered; and his trumpeters in yellow velvet cassocks, buskins, and feathers. It was a foot-page in crimson and white (the colours of Desire) who first called upon the Queen to surrender; and she having refused, the challengers rode full tilt into the lists, and with them the great gilded mount on wheels, from whence at stated times the sound of sweet music issued, and which rose up in height when the moment for attack had come, when, indeed, it rolled nearer and nearer to the Castle of Perfect Beauty, as if to carry its mistress bodily away.

Then (after more speechifying than we of modern days should have patience for) the attack with flowers and perfumes began; and then with blare of trumpets galloped in a knightly crowd of defenders, all richly caparisoned, and mounted on such excellent horses as England was noted for. And strange devices were seen in the adornment of the defenders of Beauty, for many of them appeared in some assumed character, and Sir Thomas Perrot and Anthony Cook thought fit to personate Adam and Eve, the latter wearing a mass of long hair streaming

down his helmet, though a mailed and helmeted Eve had surely never before been seen.

As for Viscount Lisle and Humphrey, who had taken counsel together, and had been furnished with their trappings by the merchant West, they were amongst the most notable figures present, and won admiration both by the sumptuousness of their apparel and the strength and grace and gallantry of their performances. Humphrey appeared in the character of King Arthur, and Lisle in that of his spotless Knight of the Grail. The former was clad in a rich suit of Moorish armour cunningly inlaid, and as light as it was wonderful in workmanship. Round his helmet was a crown of gold and rubies, and a chain of the same was about his neck. Over his shoulders hung a cloak of crimson velvet, deeply trimmed with royal ermine, and jewels glittered upon the hilt of his sword and upon the caparison of his steed, which for strength and size and beauty was hardly to be matched in the lists that day.

As for his companion, he was all white and silver—a foil and contrast to the glittering king; and the black horse and the white barb, ever side by side in the thickest of the *mêlée,* riveted upon themselves and their riders many admiring glances; whilst the Queen herself was pleased to inquire who those brave gallants were, and laughingly said to her ladies that if wed she must, she would fain own for her lord the kingly Arthur, who wore his crown so royally.

It was the eve of the second day of tilting ere the challengers yielded their submission to the Queen of Perfect

Beauty, by presenting on bended knee an olive branch for her acceptance, and then her gallant defenders rode by one by one to receive her smiles of thanks; and Humphrey, whom she detained in playful speech a while, seized this opportunity to leap from his horse, and leading it up as near the Queen as possible, begged her royal acceptance of the animal who had borne him so well, forasmuch as he himself was about to serve her on the seas, and would fain leave his steed as a pledge of his loyalty in the fair hands of his royal mistress.

The words, hastily conned, were spoken with a brave frankness that pleased the Queen, and she bowed a gracious acceptance of the gift, which was indeed greatly to her liking. And that evening, at the banquet which followed, she bestowed several marks of favour upon "her bold King Arthur," as she dubbed him, and kept him in the knot of courtiers near to her own person. This gave him the opportunity for many fond words with Alianora, who was now duly enrolled as a maid of honour; and the hopeful confidence of youth burned high in both, as they whispered together of the happy chance that had already won Humphrey such favourable notice from the Queen. It hardly seemed folly to dream of fame and wealth and Court favour for the youth whose promise was so fair; and his heart swelled with emulation and daring as he thought on the future and what it might hold for him, if he could but win such success as others no less humble than himself had done before him.

Some few days later the French Ambassadors, who were

certainly royally entertained and kept in good-humour by all the pageants provided for them, were taken in state through the city, where at every turn some new sight awaited their wondering eyes. Not only were they edified by the sight of the mayor and civic authorities in their robes of office, but every city guild mustered in livery to bid them welcome, and inflict a harangue upon the long-suffering Queen. There were morris-dancers, mummers of all kinds, and gorgeous living pictures, allegorical and otherwise, at every street corner; whilst the decorations of the houses along the royal route were such as would put to shame our modern efforts on such occasions. For in the good old days of which we write the merchants and dealers hung their costliest wares from their windows in reckless profusion to do honour to royalty, and silk and velvet and cloth of gold took the place of baize and bunting all along the streets. The immense stride that commerce had made during the reign of Elizabeth made her the idol of the commercial classes, and never was her popularity in London impugned, be the complaints what they might be elsewhere, through her vacillating policy and closeness of hand.

But the fairest spectacle of all was the one which met her returning Majesty as she neared Temple Bar on her homeward route; for with a fanfare of silver trumpets there suddenly appeared across the royal route a procession of milk-white deer (each pair led by an archer in green and silver trappings), having their horns pointed with silver, and wreaths of flowers about their necks.

These pretty tame creatures were arranged in a kind of semicircle, and as suddenly a shout was raised, each one of them dropped upon its knees, incited to the act by the huntsmen, who did likewise. Then with a trampling of many feet, accompanied by the loud cheering of the crowd, a fair silver car appeared, drawn by eight white deer, each led by a little foot-page in cloth of silver; whilst standing in the car, a bow and arrows in her hand, was a white-robed figure, so fair, so stately, and withal so greatly resembling the royal lady in the carriage of state hard by, that the cheering of the crowd became vociferous, and it was some time before the huntress Diana could find tongue to address to the other Queen the long and perfervid speech with which she came charged.

This pretty conceit mightily pleased Elizabeth. There was a delicate flattery about it which irresistibly appealed to her. Never had Constance West looked more lovely than she did at that moment, when excitement had flushed her cheek and given fire to her eye, and had so far taken her out of herself that she forgot all her nervousness, and spoke and looked like a very queen. And never had she, perhaps from this very exaltation of mind, more resembled her royal prototype. Her dress, her hair, her pose and gestures, had been carefully studied in order to enhance this remarkable likeness. Those who had the preparation of this matter had done their work right well, and the cunning of their art had not been thrown away.

The Queen was enchanted, and at the close of the

maiden's speech made fitting and gracious answer; and Lisle, who had been behind the scenes this many a day, springing from his white charger, advanced to the car of the Virgin Huntress and gave her his hand to descend. The crowd made way right and left, and the girl, blushing now and trembling, yet with a pretty native dignity which blended well with her girlish modesty, approached the royal carriage and bent her knee to its occupant, at the same time taking from her neck a collar of costly pearls and diamonds, which, together with her bow and arrows (pretty toys of ebony and ivory richly inlaid and studded with gems), she laid at the feet of the Queen, with a few words, this time of her own composition, begging her Majesty's acceptance of the poor trifles as a mark of affection and loyalty from her merchant subjects of London town.

No one ever offered a gift in vain to the Queen, and she had the art of accepting such homage in most gracious and graceful manner. Holding out her hand to the maid to kiss, she spoke words of gratitude and good-will, which evoked another loud cheer from the by-standers; and studying Constance's lovely face with close attention, she asked by what name the Huntress Queen went in her own home, and what was the degree of the damsel who bore so great a likeness to herself.

"My name, gracious sovereign, is Constance West; and I am but the daughter of one of your Majesty's loyal merchants. I pray you pardon me if I have done aught amiss in thus aping the form of royalty. They truly told me that I favoured your royal Grace; but now that I have

seen your Majesty face to face, I shall believe them no more, and bid them fool me no longer with their flattering tongues."

The courtiers smiled at the ready wit of the maid; yet Constance spoke in all good faith, for the glamour of the Queen's majesty had fallen upon her, and it seemed treason to speak of her own person in the same breath with that of the royal sovereign.

"Nay, pretty maid, methinks the flattery would be the other way," said the Queen, delighted nevertheless with the homage so eloquently expressed by the girl's ardent looks; "and I would I had so fair a double amongst mine own maidens. Ne'ertheless it may be that I shall see thee yet at Court one of these days," with a sly glance in the direction of some of her gentlemen, amongst whom was the viscount, all of whom were regarding the fair Constance with looks of undisguised admiration. "Fortune's wheel hath many a strange turn. And now, sweet maid, adieu. I shall know thee again if haply it be our lot to meet once more."

She extended her hand, which Constance kissed with deep veneration, and then Lord Lisle led her once more to her chariot; and amid the renewed plaudits of the crowd the two queens went their respective ways.

It is certainly to be hoped that the Ambassadors were kept in good-humour by these pretty spectacles without the palace, for they had much to put up with in their negotiations from the humours of the Queen, who appeared never to know her own mind for twenty-four hours to-

gether, and hampered the marriage treaty with so many contradictory clauses that her own ministers were in despair, and the Frenchmen in a maze of bewilderment.

If Burghley and Walsingham by their united efforts proved to her satisfaction by day the advantages of such a union, and the impropriety and political folly of her constant vacillations, and got her, as they supposed, to the sticking-point, all their work was undone again by the ladies of the bedchamber, who were almost all averse to the match, and who knew well how to set her Majesty against the thought of marriage, which from her early youth had been constitutionally distasteful to her. Sir John Crofts, her Comptroller of the household, was a man who, despite his unworthiness, had great and lasting influence with his royal mistress. He was in Spanish pay, and was one of Philip's creatures; and Spain had every reason to dread an alliance between England and France. Therefore all his influence was brought to bear in the other scale; and the ministers, who were made to write one thing one day, only to be ordered to contradict it the next, began to fall into absolute despair, and threaten to retire into private life rather than submit to such continual humiliations. That threat generally produced some effect, but not a lasting one. The Queen probably did not really know her own mind, and certainly allowed no one else to know it. When the French pressed the marriage, she argued that a political treaty would answer the purpose equally well; yet previously when the French had agreed to this, she inclined, or appeared to incline, to the marriage,

for which the Queen-mother was very anxious, knowing how much it must bind the two nations together. Alençon had already accepted the charge of the Low Countries, apparently at Elizabeth's wish and with her countenance; and now the marriage-treaty and nothing but the marriage-treaty would satisfy the Ambassadors. Elizabeth shilly-shallied, and professed to be waiting to hear direct from Monsieur himself upon some points submitted to him; and when one letter came, then she must needs wait for another. She was playing with Alençon, giving him money, and encouraging him to commit himself to a rupture with his brother, reckoning on her support; but whether she would ever give him the expected reward was quite another matter. However, some arrangement appeared at last to be entered upon; and the Ambassadors returned to France, with articles elaborately drawn (even down to the form of the ceremony), which had been formally subscribed; and the treaty was to become binding when Elizabeth and Monsieur both pronounced themselves satisfied—an important condition where Elizabeth was concerned; yet even those who knew her best believed her now to be too deeply committed to find any loophole of escape.

Freed from the presence of the Ambassadors, and having sent Somers after them to Paris secretly, to frustrate as far as possible all that had been supposed to be accomplished by their efforts in England, the Queen felt like a school-boy on a holiday, and turned her attention in good earnest to the programme of her summer amusements, which was of course to include one of those royal pro-

gresses to various parts of her kingdom which became such a feature in her reign.

The honour of entertaining the royal lady and her suite was such a costly one that even her loyalest nobles shrank sometimes from the expense, albeit it was an honour not altogether to be despised. The cost to the Treasury was not small either; and there were times when her ministers prayed her to travel but short distances, and for no long season together, else public service was in danger of becoming impeded from lack of needful funds.

Such men as Leicester, whom she had loaded with favours and emoluments, might well make the royal preparations that had once made the name of Kenilworth famous; but there were some nobles who were forced to beg that her Majesty's promised visit might be short, and others, again, who had sustained such damage at her hands that they had retired in dudgeon from the Court in consequence.

But in justice to the Queen it is fair to add that she was often in ignorance of the harm done her subjects, which was committed by her purveyors rather than herself, and against her own wishes.

On one occasion a farmer, who had been used somewhat unmercifully in the matter of requisitions made during a royal progress, had the boldness to watch his time and put himself in the way when the Queen came out for her morning walk. He placed himself at a convenient distance, and when he saw her attention disengaged, he began to cry aloud, "Which is the Queen? which is the Queen?"

Then, as was her habit, she turned graciously towards

him—for on her progresses she made herself readily accessible to all—and said, "I am your Queen; what wouldst thou have with me?"

Whereupon the farmer eyed her with a droll look of incredulity and admiration, and spoke his answer with arch humour. "You!" quoth he; "why, you are the rarest woman I ever saw, and can surely eat no more than my daughter Madge, who is reckoned the properest lass in our parish, though far short of you: but that Queen Elizabeth I look for devours so many of my hens, ducks, and capons that I am not able to live."

The Queen, to whom a compliment never came amiss, took the complaint in excellent good part, inquired into the matter, and finding that the purveyor had indeed been acting dishonestly, ordered amends to be made to the farmer, and had the man degraded and punished—as the tale goes, "incontinently hanged."

So it may be readily understood that a royal progress was a source of mixed pleasure and dread to the district in which it took place.

CHAPTER IX.

COMING AND GOING.

"BESS—Ivo—mother—who is within? I tell you our Humphrey is e'en now crossing the bridge on the upper road, and will be here ere one can count a hundred. He brings strangers with him too; but what of that? 'Tis he in the flesh; and marry I would know what brings him here again."

Gilbert was panting with excitement, and his mood at once communicated itself to the little group at the upper end of the hall. Mrs. Furnival rose quickly, and Bess, usually the most deliberate of the party, was across the hall and out at the door in the twinkling of an eye; whilst Barbara sprang to her feet and cried,—

"Humphrey? Art certain, Gilbert? Methought Humphrey would ere this have set sail to seek his fortune."

"It is Humphrey in all sooth; look through yon window an ye believe me not," cried the lad, hurrying out once more. "What other man hath his port and his yellow locks? Think you I would mistake Humphrey out of ten thousand? I go to be first to bid him welcome."

But he would not have been first had not the sight of

strangers caused Bess to halt in her eager flight. For she had hoped that as Ursula went away with Humphrey she would e'en return with him; but a glance at the little company showed her that there was no Ursula there. Humphrey rode between two comrades, neither of whom was known to her; and she had but time to observe that one was of middle age, dark-skinned, and deeply bronzed by exposure to sun and wind, and the other young, and of gallant bearing, blue-eyed, and smooth-cheeked, ere the horsemen had ridden up to the door, and Humphrey was bending low to receive his mother's blessing.

By this time the news that travellers were on the way had flown like wildfire through the house. Mr. Furnival and Ivo came hurrying in from the fields, and the servingmen were already on the spot to take the horses to the stable. For a moment, in the delight of seeing Humphrey back the other travellers were forgotten; but the elder of the two was not long in making himself known, for he swung himself down from his horse ere there had been time to offer assistance, and to the immense surprise and (at first) indignation of Barbara, he seized her in his arms, and covered her little brown, vivacious face with kisses.

She struggled with such good-will to free herself, and was withal so lithe and wiry, that he could not hold her long; and as he saw her crimson cheeks and flashing black eyes, so like his own, he broke into a regular sailor's guffaw, and taking her by the shoulders, cried,—

"And so thou hast the old Gammage spirit, and wilt not brook rough handling, even from thy old father, pretty

kestrel? I have seen just such a spirit and been just so handled by thy mother, when I came too quickly on her with my wooing. Ay, but thou art as like her as the foal to its dam. And so thou hast forgotten thy old father, and he must needs come and beg thy favours with mincing words and on bended knee? Nay, now, but that is better. So the pretty maid is convinced?—Good sister, I can scarce believe mine own eyes in seeing the maid so grown and well-favoured. I had e'en pictured her a little dark elf of some seven summers."

Mrs. Furnival replied with a smile as she accepted his salute,—

"Time slips away fast, good brother, and it is eighteen years agone since those black eyes opened first to the light. But 'better late than never,' as the proverb saith; and though thou art long in coming, thou art none the less welcome. But it seemeth a strange chance that hath brought thee and Humphrey here together."

"Ay, ay, thou hast much to hear that will be better told by thy gay young cockerel there, who is learning to ruffle his feathers so bravely, than by a weather-beaten old sailor like me. Why, dame, I can scarce believe it is eighteen years come John Baptist's day that I looked my last on this homestead. It is as if it were but yesterday." And the old sailor turned away with a little sigh, for his wife had died in giving birth, beneath this very roof, to the little black-eyed daughter, and it was more her loss than any lust of gain which had made a rover of her husband.

"Thou wilt find thy old seat by the chimney-corner, and

thy old place at the board," said Mrs. Furnival kindly; and giving him up to the eager Barbara, whose lack of shyness and readiness of speech were excellent attributes at such moments, she turned again to her son and his other companion, who sat still in the saddle, looking smilingly about him.

But as Humphrey turned to him, evidently about to present him to his mother, the youth sprang down from his horse and bent the knee in graceful fashion, whilst Humphrey pronounced a name which was enough in itself to win him a welcome.

"It is Mr. Robert Sidney, mother, whose brother you must know well by repute. He hath business in Romsey, and his brother favoured me by asking if he might travel in our company, as he loves the sea right well. And I brought him hither with me, feeling sure he would be welcome, the more so that he is acquainted with Lord Beauchamp, who methinks is yet here."

"Mr. Sidney is welcome for his own sake, and for thine, my son, and I would we had known of your coming to do the better honour to it, young sir. But say you you have come by sea? How chanceth that? We have had no evil wind to blow you back into port."

"It would be in truth a fair wind that should drive us to such a haven," quoth Sidney, with ready grace, as he saluted the lady after the manner of the day, and received the cordial welcome of the other members of the household. And then, whilst Humphrey told his parents that he had much to say which would bear putting off till a more con-

venient season, the youth slipped away up the steps of the house to the spot where he saw Beauchamp standing, looking on at the arrival with languid interest.

His pale face lighted as he saw his friend and comrade of Oxford days, from whom he had not long parted. Men went early to college in those days, and Beauchamp and Sidney at nineteen had both finished their studies there the previous Christmas. Although very different in temperament and character, a warm friendship existed between the two youths, and it was chiefly his wish to renew acquaintance that had brought Sidney to the Manor-house.

"My good brother would fain make a scholar of me, in lieu of a soldier or a courtier," explained the youth, as the two friends wandered a little apart from the family party, who were still engrossed in the unexpected meetings of the day. "And as I would not vex him, I have e'en promised to make a fair trial of it, with a learned man of our own kindred who dwells at Romsey and gives himself over to study. Methinks it will be lost labour, for I have that within me which tells me that the soldier's lot will be mine. But whilst there is no work for trusty swords to do, I will strive to content him by giving good heed to my books. And if you have naught better to do, why not be my companion in study once again? I warrant me the pair of us would find life not so dismal, even though we spend it in these quiet wilds, far away from the tumult which I, for one, find sweeter than any silvan solitude."

Beauchamp's face lighted with pleasure at the thought.

"There is nothing in the world that would so pleasure

me," he answered. "I have bided over long in this hospitable mansion, where chance and accident threw me."

"Ay, we have heard that story from my Lord Willoughby; wherefore I listened the more readily to Philip's words of counsel, hoping to have you for comrade here. You were tenfold more the student than I; yet I could take kindly enow to my books were it not for the spirit within, which seems urging me on to make myself rather the warrior than the poet."

"And why not both, as thy brother?" smiled Beauchamp. "But I will gladly be thy companion in study. I have no wish to leave this county, for—for—" He paused and hesitated, and then added with rising colour, "Men say there is talk of the Queen's Majesty making her progress in these parts; and if that be so, I have resolved to show myself as a suppliant at her feet, and see if she yet regards me with any ill-feeling or suspicion."

"Marry, well bethought," said Robert approvingly. "Her Majesty is her most gracious self when she leaves behind the cares of State, and if you come with a gift and a fair device in your hand, belike she will smile once more on you. There is no talk of any of your house now in the matter of succession. My Lord of Huntingdon is put forward by those who would pass over the Stuart line. I should have no fear on that score now. And she is ever inclined to favour them of goodly aspect and courtly address."

Beauchamp looked more hopeful and happy than he had done for some time, as he and Sidney conversed together.

He was greatly pleased at the prospect just suggested by his friend, of remaining in the vicinity of Wyndgate Manor, without trespassing longer on the hospitality of the Furnival family. For the past few days he had felt he ought to leave, his health being now no hindrance to an easy journey; but the uncertainty where to go, and the sickness at heart felt in the thought of parting from Honora, had made him something of a coward, so that he remained where he was, not knowing what his next step would be. And yet, since the arrival of Sir Richard, his interviews with Honora had been wofully short and unsatisfying. Without appearing to do so, the father had hindered any farther intimacy between the pair, and he had never seen her alone since that May-day afternoon in the copse, nor had any word passed between them that all the world might not hear. He was disposed to fancy that he had been deluding himself by thinking she cared for him, and he was too honourable, and too truly solicitous for her happiness, to wish to press his suit whilst the shadow of the Queen's displeasure still hung over him; but if that could once be removed, then he might approach her with a better heart, and he had been pondering on these things ever since he had heard the rumour of the Queen's possible visit to Lord Courtland's castle.

Romsey would form a capital centre for him, and both the prospect of study under the direction of a finished scholar and the companionship of Robert Sidney were very welcome. As for Robert himself, his own leaning was for the soldier's life, in which he afterwards distinguished him-

self, but his love and veneration for his brother caused him to give ready ear to any counsel from him; and although Sir Henry Sidney, their father, yet lived, and might be supposed to have the regulating of the youth's life, it was really the elder brother who played the father's part. A deep affection subsisted between them, and Sir Henry, engrossed by his duties for the Queen in Ireland and elsewhere, was content to leave his younger son to the guidance of the elder. A talented, upright, and knightly race were the Sidneys, beloved and respected wherever they went, and by all with whom they came in contact; and though Robert never won for himself quite the fame of his brother, he was yet no mean soldier, statesman, or scholar, and was fully worthy of the name he bore, as his exploits in the Low Countries before many years had passed were fully to prove to the world.

Within doors much ado was being made over the returned travellers, who came supplied with so bountiful a budget of news. As to their arrival at all, that was easily explained; for when Captain Gammage had appeared in his sudden way upon the quays of London, to hear that Francis Drake was impatiently inquiring for him, he had been speedily introduced to Humphrey and Merchant West, and the negotiation for a voyage after plunder and glory had gone on forthwith without let or hindrance.

The bold sea-rover, whose own ship was no longer seaworthy, was delighted to take command of the sloop, which was almost ready to sail, and which had been fitted out for Humphrey by his uncle. Master West was not new to

these matters, though there was something a little new to him in the character of the undertaking about to be set on foot now. He quickly had the vessel ready, and then it was that Gammage suggested sailing round by Southampton, in order to pick up some trusty seamen he knew there, ere they set sail on their long voyage. Of course such counsel pleased Humphrey, and saved him the trouble of writing long despatches home, as he was meditating. He would be able then to return home for a few nights, and tell all the news in person; and Gammage was pleased at the thought of seeing again his "little lass." He marvelled, now that he was once more beneath that hospitable roof, that so many long years had rolled by without his having set eyes upon his child or his wife's kindred; but the roving life he led seemed to have bred in him a sort of shyness of old friends and neighbours, and he was often years together without touching the shores of his native land. He generally made for the port of Bristol, and visited his own property when he did have any time to spend ashore; and so it came about that Wyndgate Manor had nigh forgotten him in all but name, and that Barbara had grown up knowing her father only through the gifts he sent her from time to time, to tell her he yet lived.

"But I have not forgotten thee, little one, all these years," he said, as she sat perched upon his knee like some black-eyed bird, turning her head from side to side, as she examined him as if he were some curiosity hitherto unknown to her. "I have not been unmindful of thee all the years I have been sailing the seas, and there is a pile

of good gold pieces laid up in sure keeping, to say nothing of such jewels as would make thee open thy black eyes an thou wert to see them. And when this next voyage is successfully brought to issue, I trow I will e'en give up this rover's life, and settle at home with my maid for company. And we will build up the old walls of the home, which hath never been home to thee, in fashion that will be the marvel of all beholders. Thou shalt live like a princess, my little one, surrounded by such things as will make good English and Welsh eyes grow round with astonishment. And there thou shalt queen it, with thy old father at thy side; and when thou art weary of thy grandeur thou canst but take wing, and leave the nest bare, as other birds of thy kind do."

But at that Barbara laughed and threw her arms about his neck. The claims of kindred were stealing upon her, and already her warm heart had gone out to this weather-beaten man, who, with all his bluffness of speech and roughness of dress, was very plainly a well-born gentleman.

"I will e'en stay with thee, sweet father," she said. "I have no will to spread my wings to such flights. Live we not in the times of good Queen Bess, the maiden Queen? And doth not she stand a living example that such a state as hers is full of honour and glory? I would be like her, and live and die a maid. Art not thou more to me than all the gay young gallants of the court, ruffling it in lace and velvet, and vying with each other who shall make the most flattering speeches?" And with that she cast a

roguish glance at her tall cousin Humphrey, of whose exploits at Court they had been hearing in Ursula's letters, which he had brought; and her merry look included also Beauchamp and Sidney, the former of whom blushed and the latter laughed.

"And when this French alliance is consummated, fair mistress?" asked Sidney. "How then will you uphold the blessed state it hath been the fashion to extol?"

But Barbara tossed her raven head, and answered with a saucy independence and vivacity,—

"A truce to your French marriages and all other marriages! Have we not heard of them till we smile at the very word? French Monsieurs, Archdukes, English Peers —have we not been told of them times and enow? and what is our royal lady still but a maiden Queen? When she is wedded, fair sir, you may come to me with your fine speeches and languishing love-looks; but methinks it will be long enough before that day arrives."

Gammage laughed heartily at his "little girl's" spirit, though Mrs. Furnival cast at her a look of gentle reproof for her saucy words; but allowance was made for her excitement and elation, and Mistress Barbara had always contrived to secure for herself a greater freedom of speech than was attempted by any of her companions.

"I shall remember your words, sweet mistress," said Sidney, with a smile and a bow; and she gave him an arch glance from her merry black eyes, half of defiance, half of admiration. For there was something of the gallant grace of Philip in the younger brother of the house of Sidney.

and his readiness of speech and tall, well-knit frame were such as to please her fancy far more than the dreamy beauty and languid elegance of the fragile-looking Beauchamp.

A summons to the supper-table put an end to the dialogue, and as at that moment Honora and her father came in from a ramble in the woods together, there were more introductions and explanations to be given; and in the confusion Beauchamp contrived to place himself next to the girl at table, whilst under the cover of such animated discussion as was going on, he was able to exchange a few words with her relative to his own plans.

Presently they found that these same plans were being discussed amongst the rest round the board. Robert Sidney had told of his proposed sojourn with the learned scholar, and of his desire for Beauchamp's company. It was plain that both Mr. and Mrs. Furnival thought the plan an excellent one, and a look of relief crossed Sir Richard's face. Matters were not tending with him as he had wished. He saw but little chance of being able to settle down upon his own estate for some time to come. He was daily expecting an order to betake himself to Ireland on behalf of the Queen and Walsingham, to see if the severities recommended by Lord Grey could not in some sort be modified, and a more merciful policy instituted. Any mission to Ireland in the days of the Desmond rebellion was fraught with more or less of peril, and he was naturally anxious to leave his daughter still in the care of the aunt who had so long been as a mother to her.

If Beauchamp were leaving, all difficulty would be at an end. Sir Richard had great hopes that when the youth once got amongst his own companions again, he would forget his fancy for the lily maiden who had tended him in his sickness. He had a not unnatural distrust of the constancy of youthful gallants, and was as pleased as Honora was sorrowful to hear that the departure was to take place on the morrow. Beauchamp, in truth, began to feel that he was outstaying, if not his welcome, at least the limits of a reasonable visit; and as it was only chance which had made him a guest beneath that roof, it certainly behoved him to throw no delays in the way of leaving, now that so fair an opportunity occurred. To him it was happiness enough to feel that he should yet be within a few miles of his lady-love (as he dared to call her in thought, though not in word). Robert was fast winning the good-will of the Furnival household, and Gilbert was eagerly describing the midsummer festivities, and begging him to be present. Opportunities for meeting would not be lacking, and as long as this was the case Beauchamp felt that he could bear anything else. Then was there not a hope of winning a smile from the Queen? And if he might do that, why should he fear to speak his love more openly?

When supper was ended and the board had been cleared, Gammage whispered a word to his servant, and forthwith there was brought to him a stout leathern bag, the mouth of which was fastened by means of a rude padlock, of which the sailor produced the key. And when it was opened he

poured out the contents of the sack upon the table, and an involuntary cry of wonder and admiration went up from all present; for it had been filled to bursting with glittering gems and baubles, such as sailors in those days brought back in quantities from lands where the simple folks at home believed that they grew upon the trees as apples do here; and the sparkling heap as it lay upon the oaken board looked as if it might well be valued as a king's ransom.

"Come hither, maidens all; come hither, good sister and brother, and you lads too, be ye gallants of the Court or plain esquires' sons. I trow there is something for each one of you, as a remembrance from a plain, bluff sailor, and a proof of what there is beyond the seas for all who would go thither and seize it.—Ha, my little maid! thine eyes glisten like these diamonds, which I took from the neck of as frowsy a hag of painted saint as one may see in a day's march. I said as I pulled them from the neck of the ugly doll that my little girl at home would wear them with a better grace. And see here: this little Venetian watch, frosted with pearls, and cunningly hidden in this ivory ball—that I bought with good Spanish gold as a fairing for thee, my child. And these rubies, methinks—"

"Oh but, father, sweet father, thou art giving me too much," cried Barbara, flushing with delight and wonder at the stores of treasures which seemed to turn the sombre hall into Alladin's cave. "How could I wear such splendid jewels? Ursula ought to have them, and Alianora, who go to the Court." But the father laughed as he wound the string of rubies in his daughter's dark locks.

"Enough for them and for thee too, little one," he said; "and thou shalt help to choose the fittest gift for every one. Now, what shall thy good aunt have? Beshrew me if she merits not the whole pile for her good offices to thee, my maid. So—that goodly chain with the pearl pendants. Ay, it looks right well upon her stately form. And here are buckles enow for all the gallants to fasten their plumes and their laces; and pretty gewgaws for maids to hang in their ears and round their necks. Take them, child, and give them as thou wilt. I have been many years filling this sack with the best of the spoil, and often have I pictured to myself this scene, but never in such fair colours as it seemeth to wear in the reality."

Barbara was delighted with this office. She was the soul of generosity; and although Mrs. Furnival came forward with gentle authority to insist that the costliest of the jewels should be reserved for her special use (little as Barbara fancied she should need them), she did not interfere with her distribution of the rest of the glittering heap, and could not but sympathize with the girl's delight in her task.

"And now, fair gentlemen, what shall be done for you?" she said, looking up archly towards Beauchamp and Sidney, when the more feminine articles had been disposed of, and the elders had gradually drawn away to the upper end of the hall. "You are so modest that one knows not what will please you best; but my father wished you to have a remembrance of him, so I pray you come and choose."

The young men came forward smiling, and Beauchamp laid his hand upon a curious crystal, upon which he had for

some time had his eye. It was one of the least costly trinkets in the heap, but it seemed to suggest an idea to him, and his face was thoughtful and intent. The crystal, which was very clear and transparent, was shaped like a heart, and framed in a quaint gold setting, and in the centre was one great ruby, which flashed blood-red in the light of the lamps.

"Is that your fancy, my lord?" asked the girl. "But you must have somewhat more than that. It is but a useless gaud. See, here is a little bag with some loose stones unset. Take them likewise, for yon great crystal heart will be of no use to you."

"Marry, I know not that, lady," answered Beauchamp, still holding the crystal in his hand, and looking thoughtfully at it. "It may chance to prove of more worth than I can well tell—that is, if I have your gracious permission to give it away in lieu of keeping it myself."

"In sooth a gallant request," laughed merry Barbara. But her curiosity was excited by his grave looks, and she came more near and examined the crystal with greater attention; whilst Honora, who was not far away, looked mutely into Beauchamp's face, as if she too would ask his meaning.

But it was Robert who first caught the true significance of Beauchamp's request, and he spoke eagerly and with manifest approval.

"Why, truly, a fair thought; I read your meaning now. You would let it be a present to her Majesty when you present yourself to sue for her favour.—Yes, ladies, that is the plan we have been conning together, and marry I see

not why it should miscarry. They say her Majesty will come this way upon her progress, now about to commence; and should she be in gracious mood, as is her happy fashion when released from State cares, she might e'en lend favourable ear to the petition of this young lord, who only craves that he be not frowned upon for the fault he cannot help, of being his mother's son. And, as perchance you know, those who come with a request to royalty come not empty-handed; and the Queen loves naught so well as some strange jewel from far-off lands, especially if it be accompanied by a cunning compliment or sonnet in her praise. —How now, Beauchamp? thou wert no novice in the art of verse when last I saw thee. Thou lookest as if the Muse burned hot within. Let us hear what form it takes."

The young man seemed to wake from his dream as the sense of this question penetrated to his understanding, but he smiled and shook his head as he answered,—

"Nay, I have cast my thought into no form as yet, but I verily believe with thy help, good Robert, I might turn this crystal heart into an advocate of my poor fortunes. See, might it not run something this fashion?—The heart so crystal clear being the type of this poor heart of mine, free from every thought of treason, as clear and pure from all taint of disloyalty as the stone which lets the sun's rays through—"

"Ay, and with one bleeding wound, typified by this red stone," cried Robert, entering into the allegory with the quickness of long practice in such quaint conceits,—"which

wound is nothing else than the fear of her Grace's frown, that has weighed down the heart and caused it thus to bleed. Ay, verily, there we have it; and cast in some elegant sonnet form, such a thought will jump well with her humour. I wish you all success, Beauchamp. It is a pretty device, and will by you be prettily carried out."

"Oh stay," cried Barbara, throwing herself into the matter with a right hearty good-will, and delighted to be able to contribute something towards the hoped-for amnesty: "that heart alone is not costly enough for the Queen's acceptance; we must fence it about with a bulwark of loyal hopes and wishes that shall be double proof of its integrity. See here these pearls and these flashing diamonds! could not some cunning artificer work them into the golden frame without spoiling its quaint design? And look you, fair sir, your heart must learn to beat, for a dead heart is worth nothing to the possessor. Here is this little watch in its egg-like case; let the same skilful craftsman attach it by these fine gold chains to the crystal heart, and then it will give life to the cold, hard stone, which else would be like a dead thing in the hands of her who is to receive it."

Robert Sidney looked with undisguised admiration at the quick-witted girl, who had entered with such keen comprehension into the spirit of the proposal; whilst Honora gave her a very sweet look of gratitude, to which she responded by a knowing little smile.

But Beauchamp paused in hesitation.

"I give you grateful thanks, sweet Mistress Barbara, but I know not what to say to such generosity. Your father

gave this costly trinket to you, to wear doubtless for his sake—"

"Oh, content you, my lord; my father is no such courtier as to think his daughter wants fair jewels to recall him to her mind, and I will answer for him that he approves what I have done, and will not grudge the pretty toy to our most gracious lady. I will tell him this very moment what we purpose, and you shall see how he takes the news."

And Barbara, a privileged maid that night, glided across the floor to the corner where her father sat, and with her arms about his neck, whispered a story into his ears which brought a broad smile over the weather-beaten face. There was nothing but approval and a sort of sly humour in the glance he turned upon the group beside the table, and Barbara tripped back, nodding her dark head triumphantly. So forthwith the whole party sat down to select the stones which were to be arranged as a setting for the heart, and to find fitting types in them for the loyal virtues which they were to portray. It was Honora's delight to contribute from her store of treasures such gems as could be utilized for the purpose; whilst Robert conned and wrote couplets, assisted by Barbara, whose ready wit often hit upon some fanciful imagery more rapidly than his own more practised pen.

Certainly the offering to be made to the Queen was costly enough to win a smile from a less gracious nature than hers. And Beauchamp's heart could not but beat high with hope at the thought of the possible result of his attempt to win the royal smile. He was too wise, and by

nature too diffident, to expect or to ask much. He knew that the Queen had pronounced the marriage between his parents to be no marriage, practically denying his right to the name he bore; but, on the other hand, it was perfectly well known that the marriage *had* been legal, and no one had seriously disputed his title, which was everywhere accorded him. He did not mean to ask any reversal of her words; she might pretend to think of his birth what she would. All he intended to solicit was some assurance that she no longer regarded him as a possible cause of sedition and trouble; and if once he could feel assurance on that point, he felt that the great bar in the way of his happiness would be removed. He might then find courage to ask in marriage the fair hand of his sweet lady-love. But he hardly dared to say as much even to himself. He held his hopes and his fears alike in check, and waited for the result of his proposed daring attempt.

Coming and going was the order of the days that followed; indeed it seemed to have suddenly become the fashion of that house.

On the morrow the two stranger youths departed for Romsey, leaving behind them many regrets, and being charged to come again ere long, and never to pass Wyndgate Manor by without a visit to its inmates.

No open words of love passed betwixt Beauchamp and Honora; possibly there were those around them who took care there should be no opportunity for any such. Yet as he held her hand at parting, and bestowed upon her blushing cheek the kiss that was permitted him by the manners

of the times, he felt that his love was not altogether unrequited, and that if he came again in guise of wooer he might not receive hard measure at the hands of his sweet mistress.

Luckily for Honora, there was little time for indulging sad thoughts or vain regrets. Her father was summoned to town by Sir Francis Walsingham on matters connected with the trouble in Ireland; and if those about her noted any unwonted absence of mind or depression of spirit, it was considered amply accounted for by the prospect of possible danger to him.

Then there were more farewells to Humphrey, and the hitherto unknown uncle, who had made such good use of his three days at the Manor that all wept at his departure, and Barbara was inconsolable for two long days. Ivo and Gilbert openly longed to be going with their brother; and the father and mother owned to each other with a little sigh that the time seemed to be coming fast upon them when all the nestlings would be taking flight together.

Master West had written urging the parents to permit Ursula to accept the post of one of the Queen's ladies. She would always have a home with him when her duties permitted her a period of relaxation, and the comfort to the Lady Alianora would be untold. Everything was to be decided when the family met once more, as was hoped it soon would, on the occasion of the royal progress into Hampshire. Meantime, Ursula might attend at Court when Lady Willoughby desired her company there; and, so far, the Queen had not renewed her offer to the girl. If she

did so, when chance threw her once more beneath her eyes, the offer should be accepted with becoming gratitude; and the letters to the merchant which Sir Richard took away with him contained a pressing invitation to him and his daughter to grace with their presence the coming festivities in and about Wyndgate Manor, which, if the Queen really graced the county with her presence, would surpass anything before known in these rural parts in the way of magnificence.

And soon there was no manner of doubt as to the coming of royalty to their doors; for upon a hot day in June there rode up to the Manor-house a very fine young gentleman, who introduced himself to Mrs. Furnival as "Alianora's brother." He explained that he had been despatched in all haste by his father to make ready at the castle for the coming of the Queen in a fortnight's time; and he prayed that the good lady, whose housewifely experiences would be of such priceless value, would deign to come across the next day to hold counsel with the army of servants, purveyors, and decorators, as to the needful preparations to be made. No expense was to be spared. The Earl was a wealthy man, and had lived at little cost these many years, so that his exchequer could well bear the drain made upon it. But Lisle, though not cramped in funds, was bewildered with the magnitude of the undertaking, and had come to seek assistance from friendly neighbours, who were in some points better instructed than himself.

And so the Manor was once again thrown into tumult

and excitement. Barbara danced and capered, and vowed that the golden age had surely begun; whilst Honora and Bess, more quiet in their ways, each looked forward to the approaching festivities,—though they knew not why Gilbert's fair head and Barbara's black one were ever in such close proximity, as if they were hatching together one of their old childish pieces of mischief, which in former days had ofttimes got them both into sad disgrace. But this plot was something else than mischief, and was to win for Barbara, little as she then thought it, admission into a new and more brilliant sphere.

CHAPTER X.

A ROYAL PROGRESS.

"IN truth a goodly mansion, and right royally plenished," said the Queen, as she dismounted from her charger —a fine black steed whom we have seen before—at the portal of Courtland Castle, and raised from his knees the master of the house, who had assisted her to alight.

"Madam, my poor lips can form no fitting welcome for your Grace's ears; your welcome shall be spoken otherwise, by the homage of deeds rather than words."

"Marry, that were fairer homage than what we poor monarchs are wont to receive," said the Queen, with a smile and a sigh. "Why, this is in very truth a fairy palace for a midsummer revel. Who hath been master of the ceremonies so gracefully displayed? Methinks he merits praise for these fair devices."

And in truth the sight presented by the gardens and grounds surrounding the fine house deserved the eulogiums of majesty: for they had been laid out with rare taste for the reception of the Queen; and as summer was at its height, nothing could have been more appropriate than the silvan sights spread out before her eyes.

The viscount had had the good taste to realize that the Queen must perforce be somewhat wearied of the everlasting magnificence with which she was surrounded, and instead of giving his whole time and attention to the refurbishing of the house, he had left that in the main to the persons appointed officially for the purpose, and had concentrated all his ingenuity upon the adornment of the gardens, which, from their size, extent, and remarkable beauty, lent themselves to all manner of cunning devices.

The house itself stood high. The ground fell away to the south, and was terraced and laid out with fountains, lawns, parterres, and pleasaunces, as well as intersected by glades, through which small cataracts tumbled headlong, and dense shrubberies of yew and evergreen, wherein the light barely struggled even at high noon. There was a maze in one part, and a hedge of clipped yew in another so wide and close that tradition alleged a coach might be driven along it without injury. Other yews had been clipped into the forms of beasts and birds which seemed guarding the still, quiet place; and now, through the skill of the viscount, and the unremitting energies of his gang of labourers and assistants, these fair gardens had been transformed into a very fairyland of brightness and beauty. Coloured waters tossed themselves into the air, and seemed to hover in rainbow tints above the blazing flower-beds. Rare fruits hung from every tree, and not fruits alone but choice flowers, and quaint devices of colour and form, whilst sweet music issued as if from the throats of sculptured bird or beast. Gorgeous butterflies

as large as eagles hung suspended in mid-air, fluttering round the flowers; and fairy-like forms flitted in and out of silken tents, these being nothing else than children of rare beauty, who, in such guise as that, were appointed to wait upon the Queen and her ladies, to be ever at hand to obey their slightest behest, and to bring, as if from the stores of the magician's palace, such rare offerings and dainty cheer as seemed to tell of other than mortal workmanship.

Lord Courtland was not a little pleased by the success which attended his son's efforts. Of long and ponderous speeches there were none—an omission which surely must have been hailed with relief by all concerned; but the pretty children, fluttering silently round, made ample atonement for this lack, by the choice offerings laid at the feet of royalty, and by the fairy-like dainties with which she was served. These provoked many an exclamation and compliment from her, and made her reception a complete and marked success.

A partial tour of the gardens having been thus successfully made by the Queen's own request, she turned her steps next towards the house, and had hardly crossed the threshold before another welcome awaited her in the form of a burst of sweet music from the gallery overhead. When the jubilant strains had somewhat subsided, a girl's voice rang out in a song of welcome,—a voice so sweet, clear, and rich that the Queen ceased her merry banter with her gentlemen to listen, and whispered to those who stood by that this must surely be some fairy songstress, as no mortal could sing thus sweetly. Another voice joined

in presently—a man's voice, and one not unknown to the Queen; and when, after a short interval, the viscount appeared for the first time to do homage to her Grace, he was rewarded with an honour of which he had little dreamed: for the Queen, taking a sword from the Earl of Leicester who stood by, laid it playfully across his shoulders, and said,—

"Arise, Sir Nightingale, thy song hath so well pleased us that we would fain reward thee in meet fashion. And thy father tells us that it is thy ready wit that hath fashioned these graceful forms of welcome. If so, we thank thee, pretty boy, and would commend alike thy taste and thy skill in carrying it out. We must make thee Master of the Revels for us some day, if thou showest such a happy knack. Methinks the fairies must indeed have been in league with thee to accomplish all this."

"Ay, madam, that they were," answered the youth gaily —"the best and sweetest of fairies, in all truth. I would your Grace could have seen them at their work; but at least you have heard the voice of one of them in the song of welcome."

"A fairy voice truly; too sweet to be of earth. And why may I not see thy fairy helpers? At least she that hath lately sung cannot have spread her wings so fast. Bring her, that I may look upon her and thank her for her soft melody."

"I fear me, madam, that she would tremble to appear before your face. No such thought was in her head as she came hither to sing her song."

"Now out on thee for a saucy varlet. Talkest thou to me of fairies, and then maintainest that they are troubled with the qualms which assail only those of mortal mould? Go thou and fetch thy fairy songstress; we would fain send her on her way to her magic land with some fitting guerdon for her sweet music."

Lisle's face wore something of a mischievous smile as he rose from his knees and hastily dashed up the staircase and into some upper chamber hard by, but shut off from the gallery in such a way that its occupants could not be seen. His voice was heard speaking in gentle tones, and then there came a pleading answer, spoken in soft, imploring accents:—

"Nay, my good lord, ask me not; I dare not—I could not. You know right well it was agreed that I was to lie here till I could escape unseen."

"But her Majesty calls for you, sweet lady," said the viscount; "'tis the penalty of such sweet singing."

"Go, Honora, go," came a third voice in more animated accents; "I would it were my hap to be bidden to the Queen's feet. Thou must not tarry when she asks for thee; go, and fear not. Why shouldest thou tremble to look on the loveliest and royalest lady who has ever graced this land?"

The courtiers smiled as these words became audible, and the Queen remarked in a low voice to her ladies,—

"Methinks we must come into the country to learn manners. We of the towns have smooth speeches for the presence-chamber, and bitter words for the private closet;

but here all is reversed. We have no desire here to push ourselves forward; it is enough to speak loyal words where there is no thought of being overheard."

Alianora, who was close beside the Queen that day, as one of the ladies included in the royal bevy, gazed eagerly towards the stairhead, and there she presently saw the viscount, leading by the hand the reluctant and blushing Honora, her simple white dress and uncovered hair showing plainly that there had been no thought of a royal audience in her mind, when she had consented to take part in the musical reception of the Queen. Alianora had recognized her voice in the first notes of the song, and was thrilling and fluttering in the delight of seeing again one of the dear home faces. And she, albeit now used to the sight of the fairest ornaments of Elizabeth's court, could not but think how very fresh and fair and sweet the maiden looked as she descended the stairs with downbent eyes and gracefully timid mien, holding fast to the hand extended by the viscount to lead her down, faltering and flushing and thrilling with nervous excitement as she felt herself in the presence of the Queen.

There was something so fresh and simple and charming in the young girl's whole air and bearing, and such a look of high birth and breeding about her every movement, that the Queen was delighted with her; and as she extended her hand for the kneeling girl to kiss, she turned to the viscount and asked who was the maiden, and what her parentage.

And when she heard that she was the only daughter of

Sir Richard Rogers, her faithful subject, more than once intrusted with difficult and delicate missions, on account of his known integrity and loyalty, her satisfaction was doubled, and she playfully tapped Honora on the cheek with her fan, and asked her what boon she had to crave, in return for her sweet song.

Honora's cheek grew crimson, and her head was bent yet lower. She wished the ground would open and swallow her up, so overcome with confusion was she at thus becoming the centre of the attention not only of the Queen, but of this whole bevy of courtiers. She did not hear the question addressed to her for the buzzing in her ears, and it was the kindly viscount who made answer for her, as he had done on a former occasion for his sister and Ursula.

"In sooth, gracious madam, the lady hath no boon to crave. It is enough for her that your Grace has been pleased with her song, and has deigned to reward it so highly. Now that she hath looked upon your Majesty's face and heard words of praise from your lips, she hath no need of any farther reward."

The Queen laughed merrily.

"Methinks, Sir Nightingale, you make but a poor advocate. It is not the fashion of these days so to respond to the offers of royalty. But the maid shall not lose through your fault.—See here, my pretty songstress," she added, turning towards the trembling girl, as she drew from her finger a ring of quaint device rather than of great value, "this ring was given me by my good step-dame the

Queen, Katherine Parr, and I should know it again anywhere. Keep it in remembrance of this day; and when thou hast a boon to ask of thy Queen, send her this ring in token, and she will remember thy sweet song, and not deny thee what thou cravest."

Honora took the ring with a few murmured words of thanks, kissed the hand that held it out to her, and then, not knowing how to effect her retreat, glanced timidly round her, and met the smiling, eager gaze of Alianora, who was close at hand. The quick flash of recognition which passed between the two girls was noted by the Queen, who turned kindly to her waiting-maid and said,—

"Ah yes, thou art in thine own home, forsooth, and knowest this fair maid. Thou hadst better go with her and renew old friendship: we can be young but once."

These last words were uttered with something of a sigh, as she observed the eager delight of the girls at this permission—delight so great that Court etiquette could scarce hold it in check. And in truth they were hardly beyond the sight of royalty before Alianora flung her arms round Honora in a perfect transport of rapture, saying betwixt laughter and tears,—

"Ah, Honora, sweetest Honora, how I have dreamed of such a meeting night and day, ever since I knew that we were coming to my father's house!"

Honora's embrace was equally warm, but she hurried her companion onward to a certain little room, evidently none of those prepared for royalty. The moment the door opened their appearance was hailed with a little shriek of

ecstasy, and Barbara was hanging round Alianora's neck, whilst the more sober Bess stood waiting for her turn, and there were such kissing and laughing and incoherent greeting as can only pass between those who have been brought up together like sisters.

"Oh, how good it is to be at home!" said Alianora at last with a great sigh. "And the sweet mother, where is she?"

"Faith, at home, cosseting and cockering our Ursula and our pretty cousin, who arrived but this morn in our uncle's charge. But my Lord Lisle had promised us a sight of the Queen's reception, the more so as our Honora's voice was wanted for the song. And here we have been hidden, from which vantage-ground we have seen much without being seen. And oh, Alianora, how strange it seemed to see thee treading in such stately fashion behind the Queen, as if thou wert to the manner born! I hardly know thee in thy Court finery, and yet it is the old Alianora after all."

"And ever thy most loving sister," cried the warm-hearted girl, again embracing her companions in turn. "And tell me now of home and the dear ones there. I am hungry for news of all. I can scarce believe it is but three short months that I have been away; it feels like so many years. But for Ursula's visits and my kind brother's goodness to me, I think I must have pined away and died—it was all so strange and so terrible at first."

"Lord Lisle is a right gallant and proper gentleman," cried Barbara with approval. "He hath quite won the mother's heart, and she hath been his right hand in making

ready for the Queen, whilst we have all been polishing our wits in the devising of new and pretty conceits. But what you see here is not all. You must come and see the pile of dry wood and the heap of bones we have got for our Midsummer-eve festival; and as for the processions and the dances and the sports, why, such things were never heard of before in these parts. The Queen's carriage hath been given by the merchants of Southampton, and is like in form to a gigantic shell, all overlaid with gold; and it is to be drawn by two score strong men, arrayed in scaly armour like sea-monsters. I warrant even you fine Court dames will open your eyes at that. And the poor folks have posies, or will have, and the farmers fruit and divers such like things to offer, whilst the bold yeomen and gentlemen will muster as a mounted bodyguard, and I wot that not many will come empty-handed. We mean that her Majesty shall know how loyal her good subjects of Southampton can be."

Alianora could have listened for ever, though she dared not long forget her duties; but as she was thinking of returning to her royal mistress, the viscount came running lightly up the stairs, and tapping at the door, brought to Alianora a message from Mistress Blanche Parry to the effect that she was released from attendance upon the Queen for a few days, and, if she liked, might go back with her companions to the Manor-house.

At hearing this good news Barbara and Bess clapped their hands, and Alianora threw her arms round her brother's neck.

"It is thy doing, dear Lisle," she said, caressing him fondly. "It is thy goodness that hath devised this pleasure for me. How can I thank thee for all thy kindness?"

"Why, by speaking my praises to thy kind mother and good father, that I may ever find a welcome under the roof which shelters thee," was the merry answer. "I shall e'en ride over to-morrow to see how thou farest. I have ceased to wonder at thy love for thy childhood's home, since I too have seen it for myself. And I must pay my *devoirs* to Mistress Ursula and Mistress Constance West, who, methinks, are there by this time."

And in effect, as there was some confusion incident to the arrival of the Queen's train, and the royal guest had retired to her own suite of apartments, Lisle declared that he should do himself the pleasure of escorting the ladies back to the Manor-house; which he did, bringing them in just as the family were about to assemble for the evening meal. And so he must needs sit down with them, and keep the whole table entranced by his stories of the journey and the Queen's pleasure at her reception. Mr. Furnival and his wife sat with smiling faces, looking at the fair tribe of blooming girls once more assembled round their table, and it was only with a little sigh of momentary sorrow that Mrs. Furnival exclaimed,—

"Ah, if we had but Humphrey amongst us!"

And the eloquent response in Alianora's eyes was not lost upon her quick-sighted brother.

To have her nursling back from the Court the same sweet, unspoiled creature she was before, and to have her

daughter at home, more fair and stately, yet not less loving than of old, was a source of pure happiness to the mother's fond heart. After the viscount had left them, attended by the two sons of the house, the girls all gathered round the father and mother at the upper end of the hall, and there all the news was told, till for a full hour after the usual time for retiring had passed the party still sat listening entrancedly to the wonderful tales the three girls from London had to tell. It was of sweet Lady Willoughby that Ursula spoke most, and it was plain that in her she had made the first friendship outside the walls of her own home. Constance had stories of London city wherewith to entertain her cousins, whilst Alianora could give many an amusing anecdote of the Court; and although she still felt strange there, and would fain have been at home, the kindness of her brother and the motherliness of Mistress Blanche Parry had made the life more tolerable than she had at first expected. If she could only have Ursula for a companion, she should be perfectly content, she said; but Ursula was evidently leaning rather to the urgent request of Lady Willoughby to pay her a long visit during her husband's next absence, which might come at any time now. The Queen was wont to demand some service from those to whom she had shown favour. And having allowed Lord Willoughby's claim to the barony, it was thought probable that it would not be long before he was despatched upon some foreign mission, the charges of which he would be expected to bear in return for his sovereign's good-will.

"I should thus be near Alianora," said Ursula; "for Lady Willoughby hath several dwelling-places, and would pleasure me, I know, by keeping near to the Court. But for the life itself I have no leaning, and methinks her Majesty hath forgotten her words spoken when she saw me first. She hath made no farther move in the matter, albeit Lord Lisle told her I had your consent to do as she would. Now that the Ambassadors have gone back, she careth less for a large retinue about her. And Lady Willoughby is so weak and failing, that she saith it is true charity to be with her; and I love the children right well."

Master West laughed and shook his head.

"Methinks, good brother Furnival, thy children will never make their way by self-interest; they let the good things pass them by, and care not to reach out a hand to pluck them as they go. But it may be they judge wisely, and that instinct prompts them aright. It is but a thorny life that of Court favour, and to those not born to it maybe it would bring naught but trouble."

And the Furnival father and mother thought none the less well of their children for acting as they had done; and even Alianora was fain to admit that Ursula was little likely to be content with the life of a maid of honour. To have her near at hand with Lady Willoughby would be a great thing; for her own father thought that Lord Willoughby was a man certain to rise in the world, and had therefore no objection to his daughter's making a friend of the wife, who was herself of noble family. So

the only thing which seemed certain was that Ursula's lot would lie for some time from home; but her parents would not grudge her presence thence, if she could be of service to Alianora and to their friend Willoughby's sick wife elsewhere.

The next days were full of excitement—so much so that a great deal went on under the very eyes of the parents without attracting attention, so full were all minds of the Queen's close presence, and of the necessity of doing her honour. Lord Lisle was backwards and forwards constantly to the Manor-house; and nobody saw anything odd in these visits, as his sister was beneath its roof. Yet, had his movements been closely watched, it might have been noted that Alianora engrossed but little of his time, which was spent for the most part in walking in the shady pleasaunce or by the rippling mill-stream with fair Constance West; and day by day her eyes grew brighter, and her cheek bloomed more rosy red, and her father looked at her fondly, and declared that country air was making quite a bonny lassie of her, whilst she thought that this country was the fairest place of all to dwell in.

And then, too, Beauchamp and his friend Robert Sidney had come from Romsey, and had taken up their quarters in a farm-house not many hundred yards distant from the limit of Mr. Furnival's boundary hedge. They decided against being regular guests to the hospitable Furnivals, but they were constantly across at the Manor-house, and took a keen interest in the preparations for the Midsummer-eve festivity, which was to be so gaily celebrated.

And it was on that occasion that Beauchamp was to play the card which might mean so much to him in the future.

As for Barbara, she was so busy and so mysterious all this while that had any one had leisure to heed her it must have been known that there was mischief, or at least some secret, in the wind. She and Gilbert were for ever missing, and when by chance they were indoors, they were to be seen with scraps of paper in their hands, from which they seemed to be conning some task. It appeared as if Mr. Robert Sidney were likewise in the secret, for he was often to be seen walking with one or another of the pair, and by his gestures and voice it would seem as if he were declaiming, or instructing others in the art of rhetoric. But in the general confusion and bustle the movements of the younger members of the family escaped observation.

It would be wearisome for the reader to listen to an account of all the feasting and hunting and revelry provided for the Queen's entertainment at Courtland Castle. Suffice it to say that every day was crowded with pleasure, and that in her fairy palace her Majesty was vastly well amused, and in as gracious a mood as courtier need wish to find her. The rustic festival of Midsummer-eve was to be the last of the series of entertainments provided for her delectation; and as it would be something of a novelty, it was hoped that she would enjoy it as much as the more costly and sumptuous pageants provided by the nobility.

The Queen's chariot was brought at an early hour of the afternoon to the castle door. It was, as has been before

hinted, in the form of a great shell, drawn by sea-monsters, and it was surrounded by a cavalcade of squires and yeomen, all well mounted, and decked with green boughs and with flowers, whilst her attendants were to follow on their own palfreys.

The Queen, much pleased with her costly car, which she shrewdly suspected would be offered as a gift to her at the close of the proceedings, stepped gaily into it; and the burly Neptune, who was seated in front with a trident in his hand, set in motion his remarkable team, who dragged along the car with right good-will, amid the prolonged cheering of the multitude.

The pace was not rapid, and indeed there was no need for that, as at every turn in the lane there was some new sight to be seen. The country people in holiday garb had all poured out to see the Queen. The women and children brought flowers to strew in her path; there were processions of cart-horses, their manes and tails braided with flowers; rustic dances or feats of strength or skill to be smiled upon by royalty; and the everlasting processions, of which every village had one to offer, all greatly resembling each other, save where a variety was introduced in the shape of a dancing bear, or an assembly of giants, each giant being composed of a strong man, a small one, and a little lad, one on the top of the other, the unsteady swaying of the gigantic and ungainly figures causing not a little mirth to the beholders.

There were bonfires all along the route, but these were not to be lighted till evening. The eve of St. John the

Baptist's Day was always celebrated by the lighting of great fires, some of them being of bones—the remnant of some popish superstition. These great fires of wood were supposed to be typical of the saint, who was called "a burning and a shining light;" and it was thought that by gazing through garlands at the flames the eyes would be preserved from all danger of malady, and that by the addition of certain prayers the ague and other ills would be warded off during the coming year.

But the grandest part of the entertainment was to be held at the village of which Mr. Furnival's house was the centre, and it was in his meadow that the tent had been erected in which her Majesty was to be feasted after her journey, before witnessing the final scene of the day. She had been offered many kinds of fruit and such like refreshment along the route; and so many had been the delays that it was nigh upon eight o'clock before she neared the great meadow, where another gay crowd was awaiting her with impatience and delight. But there was one more interruption before she reached the goal; for just as the car was about to be drawn through the gate, there appeared a curious little platform drawn by a number of goats, and surrounded by a multitude of children all singing, though not too harmoniously, some song of welcome. Upon this platform stood a black-haired, black-browed girl, richly arrayed, and sparkling with gems. She made as if she would have addressed the Queen, and had even got through some half-dozen staves all pitched in a high key of flattery, when, as if for the first time, she raised her eyes to

the royal countenance, and then at once faltered, lost the thread of the discourse, and hiding her face in her hands, suddenly sprang from the car and fled, followed by all the children, who appeared likewise discomfited.

For a moment the Queen and her attendants knew not whether this interruption were due to rustic bashfulness or were part of a preconcerted scheme; but the point was quickly settled by the approach of a youth in a gay doublet of silver and azure, who, bending low before the Queen's car, offered the following explanation of what had gone before, all in very elegant lines, not lacking in real poetic beauty, despite the fact that the theme was hardly one to inspire the mystic Muse.

It had been their wish, he said, to honour the coming of royalty by presenting to her an address of welcome; and for that purpose they had selected the most beautiful girl —according to their thinking—which those parts could furnish to offer this humble tribute of praise. All had been arranged, and all had been carried out until the speaker had ventured to raise her eyes to the sovereign countenance; and then, at sight of those lineaments, which poets had extolled and monarchs languished to behold, the maid had been so dazzled, and thrown into such sudden despair at thought of her own black head and swarthy brows, that she had forthwith forgotten all she had come to say, and had fled away to hide her diminished head out of the sight of the radiant loveliness that must dazzle all unaccustomed eyes.

Paltry flattery as it sounds to us, it was yet all the

fashion of the day to use such high-flown language; and the Queen, even at the mature age of forty-eight, was by no means averse to hearing her beauty extolled. On the contrary, her face lighted up with pleasure, and she begged the "pretty page" to fetch back his mistress, as she would fain thank her for the good welcome so untowardly cut short.

This sequel was probably expected, and Barbara was speedily found, and brought to the royal presence, her dark, vivacious face dimpling and flushing, her black eyes alight with excitement and triumph. She had far more aplomb and presence of mind than Honora had shown when called before royalty, and shading her eyes with her hand to keep up the fiction of her dazzled vision, she bent in no ungraceful reverence before the Queen's car, and laid at her feet some of the costliest of her father's jewels, praying her Majesty to accept them in lieu of the poor words which her tongue refused to speak.

"We thank you, pretty maiden," said the Queen, well pleased; "and we would know the name of our fair welcomer."

"Nay, call me not that, sweet madam," cried Barbara. "In faith, I will never let myself be called pretty again. I had e'en let them persuade me that there was some small beauty in these raven tresses and this gipsy skin; but now that I have looked on your Grace's face I will no more of it, but will bid them look where true beauty is to be found. I am but a simple country maid, Barbara Gammage by name, the daughter of one of your Majesty's sea-rovers, who hath

gone forth to help to make famous your Grace's name in the lands that lie beyond the setting sun. These poor tokens, of which I beg your gracious acceptance, were brought home by him after a recent voyage, and they do but form an earnest of what he hopes to lay at his royal lady's feet, an Heaven send him favouring winds and good hap on the seas."

"I thank you, sweet Mistress Barbara, and will wear them gladly in token of my regard. And in your father's absence where dwell you, my maid? Do you belong to these parts? And have you a mother yet living to care for you?"

"I have and I have not, your Majesty," answered Barbara, with the same ready ease of manner. "Mine own mother died ere I had well drawn breath. But yet I have never known the lack of mother's love; for my sweet aunt, Mrs. Furnival, on whose land we now stand, hath ever been a mother to me, and I have dwelt all my life in her care. And this youth is her son, and your Majesty's very humble servant."

"Furnival—ha! the name haunts me. Ay, I remember my Nightingale told me that those same Furnivals dwelt in these parts.—Young sir, I would fain see your good parents; run and fetch them to me.—And you, my child, since you have no strong claim upon you, how would it pleasure you to remain with me as one of my maids? Thy father hath provided thee with jewels enow"—with a smiling glance at the girl's sumptuous adornment, and at the rich gems in her own hands—"and methinks thou art

of the stuff that is lost in these rustic parts. How wouldst thou like to spread thy dark wings for a higher flight?"

In truth Barbara wished for nothing better. The restless spirit of the day was stirring within her. She had heard enough of life at Court to thirst for a taste of it herself. So much had happened of late to vary the monotony of home that she felt a singular reluctance at the thought of returning to its eventless round, when once the excitement of the present was over. It was with a sort of wild hope of obtaining royal notice that she had planned her part in this welcome, and now it seemed as if her fondest dream were about to be realized.

The Queen, on her side, remembering that she had made some offer of advancement to a girl of that household, and not quite certain how the matter stood, resolved to transfer her favour to this black-eyed maid, who had won her favour by her ready wit and boldness of speech. It pleased her to surround herself with ladies whose charms formed rather a foil to her own than provoked any manner of comparison. And when, later in the day, Mr. and Mrs. Furnival were led to the royal presence, it was easily arranged that Barbara should take the place amongst the ladies-in-waiting which had once, in a careless impulse of good-nature, been offered to Ursula. Barbara, who was her father's heiress, and who might one day succeed to no small wealth, as well as to his broad acres in Wales, seemed a more fitting member of the Queen's household than a simple esquire's daughter, who had nothing but her own small portion to call her own; and the gain to Alianora

would be almost the same. Indeed in some ways the quick-witted, ready-tongued Barbara would be a more useful companion than the more quiet and retiring Ursula.

The day was darkening ere the Queen rose from her seat in the tent where she had supped, and where Barbara's fate had been settled, to her own great delight. Outside there were sports going on, at which the Queen was pleased to look on, and some graceful feats of horsemanship, performed by some of the well-born youths present, were rewarded by the plaudits of royalty.

One young gallant in particular attracted her notice from his peculiar grace of person and the pensive beauty of his face. The Queen looked long at him, as if striving to recall some vanished memory; and as the youth had successfully carried off the ring three times consecutively, and that in failing light and at full gallop, there was nothing strange in his presenting himself before her, to kiss the hand smilingly extended; for her eye had been long upon him, and seemed to bid him draw near.

Young Sidney followed close beside him, and he was well known to the Queen, who gave him a smile and a nod of familiar greeting.

"You did right well, young sir, although your friend did better. We have missed you from Court, but heard you were prosecuting your studies elsewhere. Is this how you make yourself a student? And how call you this 'fidus Achates' of yours? Methinks his face is not altogether unknown, yet if he had been at Court I surely should have remembered him."

"He hath not been at Court, gracious madam, much as he hath desired to see your Majesty face to face, and present his humble petition for clemency and grace. The youth before you is Edward Seymour, Lord Beauchamp, and he craves permission to offer to your Majesty his poor gift, in token of his loyal fealty to the throne."

As the name passed Sidney's lips the Queen started and frowned, and seemed about to turn away; but something in the imploring look in the eyes of the youth deterred her, and she let him kneel at her feet and present his gift. Robert, more ready of speech than Beauchamp, explained in graceful words the meaning of the token, which was also written out on a scroll, over which the Queen cast her eyes with a smile. She examined the gift with manifest pleasure, and at last bent a searching glance on the youth.

"Rise, good cousin," she said after a moment's hesitation; "we have no quarrel with you. You need not fear harm from us. Come; this is no time for recalling what is painful in the past. It is the hour for frolic and laughter. Here, lead on to yon fire, and let us put in the torch that is to light up the pile. We will have naught but good-will and gaiety of heart to-day."

And Beauchamp, with a deep flush and a few murmured words of heartfelt gratitude, first pressed the Queen's hand to his lips, and then led her forward to the great wooden pyre. As he approached his eyes sought Honora's face, and such a look passed between them as was forgotten by neither, and seemed an earnest of happiness to come, even though clouds might still lie athwart their present path.

CHAPTER XI.

PEEPS AT COURT LIFE.

"TIDINGS, tidings, maidens all! What think you hath befallen? Marry, I thought it was but idle jesting when I heard it first. I gave no credence to what they said; but beshrew me if it be not true. It is all over the palace by now. Guess now, all of you. I warrant not one of you will hit the mark;" and Barbara cast herself down panting upon a skin mat before the cheery fire of sea-coal that burned in the long gallery, whilst her companions looked up from their embroidery frames with glances eloquent of curiosity.

The court was at Greenwich Palace, the birthplace and favourite residence of the Queen. It was November now, and the cold cheerlessness of the outside world had to be atoned for within doors by such a measure of warmth and brightness as could be attained by artificial means. Barbara had been for some time pursuing her new duties, and had won for herself the position of a privileged person with all about her. Her never-failing high spirits and her good-nature made her a favourite with the other girls, whilst her ready wit and quickness in turning a compli-

ment or passing a repartee had often won her a smile from the Queen. Mistress Blanche Parry did indeed shake her head sometimes at her wild pranks and random spirits, but as a matter of fact she laughed as much as anybody over them; and since Barbara was Alianora's greatest friend, she could not but be regarded indulgently by the senior maid of honour on that account.

Alianora's sweetness and tender thoughtfulness to the aged gentlewoman, whose sight was now beginning to fail, won her the gratitude and affection of Mistress Blanche to no small degree. It was Alianora who sat beside her when she tried to work at the accustomed embroidery, which filled so much of the time of ladies in those days, threading her needles and guiding her when any intricacy in the pattern puzzled her, rectifying any false stitches without a word and as if the error were her own. The poor lady was half ashamed of her infirmity, and sensitive about its being noticed; and so this delicate carefulness and consideration won her heart, and she made of Alianora an almost professed favourite. When Barbara made her appearance amongst the ladies, she was received with favour as being known and loved by Alianora; but she soon won for herself a position of her own, and had been even seen to draw smiles from the melancholy Walsingham himself, when they had been in the same company. The genial Lord Burghley often turned with a smile to pass a jest with the sprightly maid of honour, and the courtiers all paid her compliments. But she had so far avoided giving the smallest offence to the Queen, who was not

fond of seeing her ladies too much admired; being more lucky in this respect than Alianora, who had several times drawn down the royal frown upon herself, not for anything she had said or done, but because Leicester and other gentlemen of the palace had seemed to pay her too great a meed of attention.

When Barbara rushed into the gallery, which was the gathering-place of the Queen's ladies who were not in immediate attendance, full of her important piece of news, there was a flutter of excitement,—for anything was welcome which broke the monotony of those long winter days, —and some guessed one thing and some another; whilst Barbara laughed and shook her head over each surmise, and then, as if afraid somebody would be before her with the exciting news, she burst out without further parley.

"Nay, now, good maidens, your slow wits will never jump at it. What say you to this? Here hath Monsieur, weary of waiting for a summons to his royal mistress's side, taken law into his own hands, and without waiting for sanction either from his own brother of France or from our royal mistress, hath quietly slipped over here from the Provinces, and is lying now at Deptford, craving leave to throw himself at her Majesty's feet this very day. What think you of that? Shall we not change our tune now, and call him a very perfect gentleman for his bold deed? Tell me, you who have seen him before, what is this sweet prince like? I have heard he is ugly as sin, and a bandy-legged, hump-backed monster. But methinks were that so her Majesty would never tolerate him

near her. She loveth a shapely figure and a handsome face."

"Ay, but she hath shown strange favour to this little monstrosity," answered Alicia de Vere, when the excitement aroused by Barbara's news had somewhat abated. "First she took a mighty liking to Monsieur Simier, his envoy, calling him her Ape and such like names, whereby she pleases to express her favour to her gentlemen admirers. And when the duke came himself last time, it was a marvel to see how she smiled upon him. He was her Frog-prince, and nothing was good enough for him; and I know not what folly did not pass between them, and she old enough to be his mother all the while. But no one thinks of that; and he seemed mightily pleased and flattered, and went away in high hopes of calling himself King of England one day. I warrant he hath come here to see if he cannot bring her Grace to the sticking-point."

"He will be a clever Frog if he can," laughed Barbara, who had seen and heard enough of the bedchamber gossip and intrigue to be very sceptical about any royal marriage; and then she too suddenly dropped her voice, for a page had come in with a message bidding the ladies repair to the Queen's closet. She had something of importance to communicate to them, and they flocked thither full of excitement and curiosity.

Her Majesty received them with laughing looks that belied the gravity of her words. She told them how that her dear and well-beloved duke had crossed the sea in order once more to behold her, and sun himself in the light

of her countenance, and how that as such devotion merited a fitting reward, a most gracious reception was to be accorded him. The ladies were to attire her and themselves with all becoming grandeur for the coming meeting, and the Queen's robes selected for the occasion were of almost bridal purity and richness.

In the fine hall called the presence-chamber, hung with Gobelin tapestry and strewn with rushes, the Queen a few hours later awaited her royal suitor. Her gentleman-pensioners with their gilt battle-axes formed a fitting body-guard, and the beef-eaters in their quaint dress stood halbert in hand at the lower end of the hall. Burghley, with his snow-white beard and smooth, unwrinkled face, his scant hair tucked beneath a velvet bonnet, stood close behind his mistress; whilst Walsingham, with the dark, melancholy Spanish eyes, was beside him, and had the courage to say in a low tone to his mistress shortly ere the duke was announced,—

"You know best your own intentions, madam, and how you intend to receive Monsieur; but it behoves you to act with discretion and consistency, for France is growing aweary of these vacillations on your Grace's part, and will regard as an affront any advance which is not duly followed up."

The Queen listened, and answered by an arch smile which boded but ill for her realization of the possible gravity of the situation.

"We thank you for your wise counsel, good Mr. Secretary," she replied. But Walsingham fell back with a glance

at Burghley which plainly said that he expected nothing but trouble and confusion from the proposed visit.

And before anything more could pass, the little duke had entered the hall, and had prostrated himself at the feet of his royal mistress.

Prepared as Barbara had been for an ugly man, the insignificance and repulsiveness of Alençon quite took her aback. He was bandy-legged and slightly deformed. But these defects were not the least; for his ugly face was deeply pitted with the small-pox and as brown as the skin of a frog, and his nose was out of all proportion to the other features, being enormously large and knobbed like the claw of a lobster. It was perfectly incomprehensible to those who knew the Queen's partiality for physical beauty how she could tolerate in her presence such a hideous little anatomy, who added to his other charms a hoarse, high-pitched, croaking voice and great ungainliness of action and gesture. But in spite of everything the Queen smiled most graciously upon him, bid him welcome in terms of real endearment, and when the formal reception broke up, bid him to supper with her in private, and acted as if she really had resolved to share her throne with the little misshapen Frenchman.

"What sayest thou now, sweet Mistress Barbara?" asked a quiet voice in the ear of the astonished waiting-maid, who, with all her keenness of wit and shrewdness, began to think she had been deceived, and that the Queen's own mind must be changing. She turned quickly to find herself face to face with Robert Sidney, whom she believed to

be far away in Romsey. Her colour flew up at the question, but she had a saucy answer ready.

"Say? why, I say that the little French duke is the ill-favouredst specimen of an ill-favoured race; and that he is a living warning to all maids not to be in any haste to change their state. If our royal mistress weds with the like of him, never call me clever again. I would sooner, for my part, mate myself with a dancing bear."

"Maybe there would be a third choice for thee," said Robert, with something between mirth and admiration in his glance; but Barbara only tossed her head and said,—

"The Queen is not wed yet, and methinks men may wait long enough ere she is. She hath played with suitors before now, and that Frog-prince can surely never be made our king."

Robert smiled and then looked grave.

"An she go on too long with such trifling, she will chance to call down a war with all France upon our heads. King Henry is tired of this fooling, and will not stand much more of it. If she does not mean to wed him, she never should have received him. I met my Lord Treasurer going home even now, with the gout so bad in his foot that he could scarce hobble. He had left his bed to be nigh at hand to watch her Majesty's demeanour, and he said to me as we met: 'If she changes her mind now, we may as well make up our minds to war, and that will cost her more than the worth of these smiles and soft words. When is a woman committed past all power of drawing back?'"

"Marry, a question many would fain see answered in these days," laughed Barbara. "But methinks our lady will teach them all a lesson yet."

But it certainly seemed as if the Queen meant business this time. For days she and the duke were constantly closeted together, discussing, as was reported, clauses in the marriage-treaty, and that in the most amiable way possible. The duke, in his anxiety to bring matters to a point, was ready to concede almost everything, and the ministers began to hope that things were fairly in train. Averse as they had been at one time to the French alliance, they now were eager for it. They thought that the Queen had gone too far to draw back, and it seemed as if an open rupture with France must be the result of any refusal on her Majesty's part to consummate the proposed marriage. Burghley and Walsingham were alike ashamed of the perpetual vacillations and shifts of their royal mistress, and were heart and soul in favour of the union: but until the ceremony had really been performed nobody could feel safe; and King Henry of France, after his brother had been a week or two in England, wrote to his Ambassador, Mauvissière, to instruct him to see the Queen, and demand in set terms what were her intentions with regard to the proposed treaty and the marriage.

It was one cold wet morning late on in November. The Queen was taking her usual walk in the long gallery of the palace. Alençon was at her side, together with Walsingham, Leicester, and others, whilst in an adjoining chamber, full in sight of the gallery, some of the ladies sat

at their embroidery, watching the Queen at the same time, and conversing in low tones amongst themselves.

Barbara and Alianora were amongst this group, as were also Lady Mary Howard and Alicia de Vere. Poor Lady Mary was rather out of humour, for she had been much vexed at an act on the Queen's part of what she, not unnaturally, considered unjust interference with the rights of a subject. A present had recently been made to her of a costly farthingale, with a border of great richness, being, in fact, all powdered with gems; and when the maid of honour had appeared in this sumptuous garment for the first time, it was plain that the Queen's eye had been upon it, and that it had not rested with any favour upon the fine trimming. The day previous, in the absence of the owner, the Queen had got possession of the rich vesture, and had put it on. Although not really tall of stature, the Queen was taller than her waiting-maid, and when she showed herself to them thus arrayed, her appearance was somewhat grotesque. She asked several of the ladies how they liked her new-fangled suit, and by-and-by addressed the question to the dismayed owner thereof, who thought the Queen proposed to take possession of it for herself. Trembling with anger and dismay that she had to keep in check, Lady Mary replied that it was something too short and ill-fashioned for royalty.

"Marry, if it is too short for me, it is too fine for thee," was the Queen's reply, as she stepped out of the offending garment and left it lying on the floor; and the mortified waiting-maid had perforce to take the hint, and lay by her

fine robe, which saw the light no more till after Elizabeth's death.

So to-day she was in an ill-humour with her mistress, and passed many sneers upon her mincing gait, her affected laughs, and the absurd way in which she let herself be fawned upon by "that miserable little duke, whom none of her ladies would demean themselves by noticing." Barbara laughed, and tried to coax her back to good temper; and as they chatted thus in whispers, a gentleman pensioner came into the gallery with the news that the French Ambassador craved an audience of her Majesty.

"Bid him come to us here," quoth the Queen, into whose eyes a sudden light had leaped; and as the servant withdrew, she turned with a fond smile to Alençon, and said,—

"Methinks he cometh for an answer for his royal master. Say, my fair Frog, what answer shall we return to him?"

"Ah, madam," replied the duke, in accents which croaked more than ever in the desire to be moving and melting, "I know what message I would fain send back to my royal brother; but it is with the sweetest and noblest princess upon whom God's sun hath ever shone that the answer lies. An it were my lot to choose, I should not need pause to consider."

The Queen laughed. She was looking wonderfully handsome that day; her cheek was flushed, and her eyes were alight. There was nothing of age in her aspect or carriage. She bore her years with a peculiar ease and grace. Wal-

singham, narrowly observing her, said that there was something new working in her mind that day.

Barbara noted this same thing, and watched breathlessly for the next scene in the drama. It quickly came. The French Ambassador was ushered in, and when the usual formalities in the way of salutation had been gone through, he addressed to her Majesty a question which plainly had been conned beforehand with all the grace of a Frenchman's art. The straining ears of the girl could not catch the words, but their import could well be guessed, and as he spoke the little train was slowly advancing up the gallery. Thus it was that when the Queen spoke every word was distinctly audible.

"Write this to your master," she said: "'The duke will be my husband,'" and with that she turned upon her Frog-prince, and imprinted a kiss on his brown lips. She next took a jewelled ring from her finger, and placed it upon one of his crooked claws; then raising her eyes, and beckoning to her ladies to come, she led Monsieur a few paces forward, and said,—

"Maidens, behold your future lord and master. The noble duke will be my husband ere many weeks have passed by."

The enraptured duke fell at her feet, and almost wept in the plenitude of his gratitude and delight. The Queen raised him with fond words, bidding him kneel no more to her; and the astonished ladies and gentlemen of the household discreetly retired, leaving the happy pair to enjoy their bliss together unobserved.

"Now Heaven be praised!" was Burghley's exclamation when the news was brought to his bedside; "the Queen hath done her part this time. There can be no drawing back now."

But even he had yet more to learn of the caprices of his royal mistress.

Three days later it was Barbara's turn to assist at the Queen's unrobing for her bed. During those three days gossip had been rife to the effect that things were not going altogether smoothly between the royal lovers. Walsingham's face betrayed, to those best acquainted with him, anxiety and impatience, and there had been rumours of stormy debates in Council and closet.

As the Queen was sitting to have her hair taken down from the stiff erection into which it was daily built up, she called Barbara to her feet to amuse her by retailing some of the gossip of the Court.

"Marry, madam, how can we talk of aught but the approaching nuptials of your Grace?" cried the girl with well-affected eagerness. "Tell me now, I pray you, sweet madam, where they are to be celebrated? We are consumed away in our curiosity, and none can tell us sooth. I trow your Majesty will not be so stony-hearted as to deny to us, who love you, the first notice of matters of such moment. Those without the walls believe us not when we talk of marriage; but an we could tell them the hour and the place—"

"Ay, child, then tell them the Moon King's palace, and the year of our Lord 2000; for that, methinks, will well be

the time ere we sell our royal liberty to that ill-favoured Frog, of whose harsh croaking we are sick to death."

Barbara clasped her hands in ecstasy.

"O madam, sweet madam, is't really thus? Now may Heaven be praised for delivering us from such a master as that brown-faced Monsieur! For if the loveliest lady on earth deigns to give her hand in wedlock, it were shame to think of linking it with that brown paw, which methinks more greatly resembles a monkey's than a man's. Did not I always say how it would be? I knew our beauteous lady could not stoop thus low."

"Thou art a malapert wench, in sooth," laughed the Queen, who nevertheless looked not displeased at the words. Indeed Barbara had not gone thus far had she not seen by the look in her mistress's eyes that she might dare to say what she would that night. "But it is Monsieur's fault, for now he saith he cannot pledge me to restore Calais as the wedding-gift I craved; and I will none of him, brings he not that fair city with him. He bade me hope all and believe all once; but it is a different tune he sings when his royal brother thinks I am committed past power of drawing back. Doth he think, forsooth, that he can compel me to do his will? And doth that little brown-faced Ape fool himself with the thought that I care two rushlights for his ugly face? Am I not sworn to live and die a maid? And will I not keep that oath before all others that I make, or are made for me?"

The ladies applauded the sentiment, and by every flattering device strove to undo the work of her ministers;

and so the farce was played day by day, neither party knowing how things would turn, but the prospect of the marriage ever seeming to grow more dim.

Still the duke was there, and he had the Queen's ring and the Queen's most solemn promise, and what was to be done with him?

"He must go back to the Provinces," quoth the Queen, who still in public kept up the farce, and showered favours and smooth speeches upon the unhappy Frog, who was torn in twain between doubt and fear, and was more fooled even than the ministers and the nations.

But for once the Frog proved obdurate.

"I tell you, madam, I will not leave this realm till I leave it with you at my side, as my wedded wife. I have incurred a thousand risks for you, and sooner than go without my bride, I would that we both perished together."

Then the Queen appeared to be much agitated, and something displeased at his boldness.

"It is not fair, Monsieur, thus to threaten me, a poor old woman, in mine own kingdom. What mean you by such words? It sounds passing like as if you meditated some evil and violence. We are not to be wooed thus."

"No, no, madam," cried the poor Frog, bursting into tears; "you mistake my words. I meant no hurt to your blessed person. I would be cut into a thousand pieces sooner than ill should befall you. But I am dying of the love I bear you; and if I leave ere I have wedded you, I make myself the laughing-stock of all the world."

It must be owned the poor duke was the laughing-stock of all the Court, as the Queen with her own kerchief dried his brown cheek, promising again and again that she would marry him when he had won honour and glory in the Provinces, where his place was now, and his absence from which was doing untold harm. Let him but do his duty there in the present, and she would be his wife when he returned.

"The tricks and shifts the Queen is playing to get rid of Monsieur," wrote the Spanish Ambassador to his master, "are more than I can describe." And Elizabeth proved more than a match for her victim, whilst the imperious summonses to Alençon from the Prince of Orange (all made at her instigation) at last convinced him that he must go back. She accompanied him all the way to Canterbury on his departure, lamenting at every stage upon their approaching separation; whilst in the privacy of her bedchamber she literally jumped for joy at the thought of being rid of him for good and all. For she was very well resolved that this visit should be the last.

A little tender lament in three graceful stanzas was her parting gift; and as she wended her way homeward again, in the early cold of February, she abused her counsellors roundly for depriving her of the only lover who ever pleased her fancy, and with many sighs declared that it grieved her to the heart to think of her poor Frog suffering in those stagnant marshes, and that she would give all the riches of her Treasury to have him swimming in the Thames again.

There were yet a few more scenes to be played out in the Alençon farce, as when in the next year the attempted and almost successful assassination of the Prince of Orange put Elizabeth into a fever of terror lest such an attempt should be made on her own person. She would have sent in all haste for her "Frog" to come and wed her, as if by that means he could save her from danger; but her ministers, knowing now that nothing would really bring her to the point, and knowing too that the temper of France was growing very dangerous, would not permit this crowning act of folly. A year later still the final scene came with the death of the duke, caused in part by perpetual uncertainty and mortification. Elizabeth then thought fit to put her Court into mourning, and pathetically described herself to the French Ambassador as a "forlorn widow, robbed of the dearest treasure of her heart;" whilst the shrewd Walsingham wrote with decorous gravity the intelligence that—

"Monsieur is dead; wherefore melancholy doth so possess us, as both public and private business are at stay for a season."

And thus ended the final page of that strange wooing of the royal Elizabeth.

But the Queen was not the only person in these days threatened by matrimonial peril. For whilst the matter of Alençon still hung in the balance, the Czar, Ivan Basilovitch, sent to the Queen to request her to negotiate a peace between him and King John of Sweden; which she did so successfully that he was encouraged to hope she could

aid him in another matter, and accordingly sent over a deputy to confer privately with her Majesty on this new subject.

As it chanced that Barbara and Alianora were taking an airing together in the beautiful long walk of Richmond Palace, which was the Queen's present place of abode, a message was brought to the ladies that the Queen desired their presence in her closet. Alianora began to tremble, though she knew not exactly why, for of late she had felt that the Queen had been regarding her somewhat closely, and knew not whether or no it was with favour.

"I trow it is to receive a scolding," she said to Barbara; and the dark-eyed girl laughed as she replied,—

"Nay, pluck up heart of grace, and look not as if thy conscience accused thee. Thou art in no fashion to blame, yet I would thou hadst the knack of ridding thyself of the attentions and the admiration which the Queen's gentlemen will ever be paying thee. Even the great Lord Leicester cannot keep his eyes off thee, though thereby he wins many a frown from the Queen; but she cannot say that thou dost aught amiss. So be not fearful nor faint-hearted. I would it were I to take the scolding; I warrant I would soon turn it into laughter, albeit it were accompanied by a box on the ear."

But Alianora had none of the happy courage and saucy readiness of tongue which gave Barbara such advantage over her; and when she reached the Queen's closet she dared not raise her eyes, and saw not at first that her father was standing behind the Queen's chair, with a look

of mingled pride and perplexity upon his face. The Queen was looking gracious and pleased.

"Ha! here cometh the pretty damsel; in faith she will make a right royal ornament to our good cousin's Court. Tell her, fair sir, what we have in prospect, and what a dazzling future is in store for her."

And then Lord Courtland stepped forward, and took his daughter's hand in his.

"My child," he said, "you are greatly honoured this day in being the instrument chosen of her Majesty to fulfil a lofty part. The great Muscovite Emperor hath sent a deputation to her Grace, to select for him, from the daughters of English nobles, a consort to share with him his imperial throne, and her gracious choice hath fallen on thee. Now, therefore, kneel and thank her for the favour which hath distinguished thee above thy fellows, and hath been willing to raise thee to a dignity only granted generally to princes."

But Alianora's cheek turned white, and she shrank back overcome with horror at the bare thought of the proffered throne.

"Oh, sir," she entreated; "ah, gracious madam, do not banish me thus. I am not fit for a throne. I am no fit mate for a sovereign. Surely I have heard amiss: it cannot be that this fate is to be mine."

Her terror and distress lent her courage for the moment; but her vehemence displeased the Queen, who had talked to the father, and had conquered his first scruples, and brought him and herself to the belief that a very brilliant destiny

was opening out before the girl. So she rose in displeasure at Alianora's tone, turning to Lord Courtland as she swept away, saying,—

"I will e'en leave the saucy wench to you, and you will teach her her duty. When a father and a sovereign alike combine to command, there may be nothing but submission in the daughter and subject."

The words were spoken so imperiously that Alianora's heart sank; and when her father sternly told her that there could be no gainsaying the Queen's words, and that she must prepare herself for her regal destiny, and look upon herself as the future Czarina of Russia, all her tears and prayers were alike thrown away. He merely answered that he too was a subject; that he had raised some objections himself at first, but had found that to persist in them would be as much as his place at Court was worth, and that he and she must also submit to the royal will. And he concluded by adding that when she once became used to the new land, the unknown spouse, and her imperial state, she would doubtless be very happy; but that it was neither in her power nor his to resist, unless she would ruin them both, and her brother's whole future to boot, by drawing upon them all the fierceness of her Majesty's displeasure.

Whilst Alianora sat stunned and despairing, feeling as if resistance were but to hurl herself against a wall of adamant, Barbara stood by in silence, clenching her little white teeth together in a sort of feminine fury. She had guessed enough of Alianora's secret by this time to know that such banishment and such wedlock would be worse

than death; and yet she knew well the present temper of the Queen, which was not sweetened by her own love affairs, or her troubles at home and abroad; and that to cross her will in this might be dangerous.

"There is one person who may save her yet," said the girl to herself; "but I know not where he is, or how he can be brought hither in time. I must e'en go and see what can be done."

Barbara had many friends at Court; yet there was only one of these whom she cared at this moment to trust, and that was Robert Sidney.

She had seen him but lately playing bowls upon the green, and darting out unnoticed by a side door, she had soon gained the alley, and had fixed him by her earnest gaze. He came to her instantly—he had a way of gravitating towards her whenever she appeared—but the dark, set look on her face showed him something was amiss, and he did not commence his usual merry banter, but asked quickly what was the matter, and how he could serve her.

"Where is Lord Lisle?" she asked; "I have not seen him this many days at Court. Know you where he may quickly be found?"

"Ay, at Berwick—on some business anent this new Jesuit plot. I know not exactly what. Nay, why do you wring your hands? Is ought amiss so serious?"

"Ay, so serious that if he be not here quickly, to appease her Majesty and win over his father, the Lady Alianora will be despatched to be the wife of his Imperial Majesty of Russia. The Queen is resolved; her father is

affrighted into acquiescence; and if her brother come not to her aid, she is lost indeed."

A sudden look of resolution came over Robert's face.

"If it will pleasure you, sweetest mistress," he said, "nay even for the fair lady herself, I will ride without drawing rein, to take him word, and will bring him back ere three more suns have set. Think you it cannot be done so fast? You shall see what love can do when the time presseth and danger be great."

Barbara's cheek glowed at his look rather than his words; but she only said,—

"I thank thee from my heart, gracious youth. I will thank thee more when thine errand is accomplished."

But Barbara feared to hold out hopes to Alianora, lest they should be doomed to disappointment. The girl seemed sunk into a kind of trance of misery, whilst her espousals were openly talked of at court; and though it was plain that some regarded her as the victim of a diplomatic treaty, others openly envied her for her splendid destiny, and wondered to see her so wan and white and lifeless. And in truth, after the first wild struggle against her fate, Alianora had fallen into a sort of strange apathy, and all that even Barbara could draw from her was this: that nothing would induce her to wed the Czar when she arrived in Russia, though she knew that her decision would cost her her life. No one would believe her here, thinking her words the outcome of obstinacy and rebellion; but Barbara felt certain they were the result of deep deliberation, and that in spite of her reputed timidity and lack

of spirit, Alianora would be true to them and to herself, and suffer death rather than pledge herself to any man, be he monarch or no, when her heart belonged to Humphrey and to none else.

But for the present, whilst preparations for fitting out the future empress were commenced in lavish style, the girl herself was permitted more of liberty than before, and Barbara followed her like a shadow, half fearing to let her out of her sight, in her dreamy strangeness of mood. And thus it was that they were sitting together in a shady summer arbour, when Barbara heard a footstep rapidly approaching, and springing to her feet, exclaimed,—

"It is he, it is he! He hath come!"

The next moment Alianora was clasped in her brother's arms, whilst no one had time or attention to give to another greeting which quickly followed between bright-eyed Barbara and young Sidney.

Both men were travel-stained and weary — indeed, Robert looked as if he had hardly slept for many nights; but Lisle's first words brought a throb of joy to Alianora's heart, and caused Barbara's eyes to open wide with astonishment.

"I bring you your reprieve, sweetest sister. Her Majesty is pleased to repeal her order. You go not to Russia, or now or any other time; and his Imperial Majesty must look elsewhere for a wife."

And as Alianora, hardly able to believe her ears, lay upon her brother's breast, clinging to him as if to her sole support, Barbara found tongue to exclaim,—

"But you cannot yet have seen the Queen! you are but just returned from your journey."

"That is true, Mistress Barbara," answered Robert. "And yet fortune hath so far favoured us that we *have* seen the Queen. Know you not that she goeth hunting to-day? Well, it was our hap to meet her alone, save for two gentlemen, returning from a merry run, her heart light and her face full of smiles. You know the favour she bears to Lisle, and so soon as she saw him she called him, saying merrily that she had a piece of news to tell him, and asking how he would like for his sister to be made an empress. And he, being full of wit, made as if he had heard the news but for the first time, and said he would like it well, an it were not the Emperor of Russia who came wooing. At that her face changed somewhat, and she asked what he knew against that potentate; whereupon he answered that he knew naught, but that Russia was a far-off and barbarous land, and that the Czar was allowed by law to change his wife as many times as he chose, and fully availed himself of such liberty, asking if that were not reason enough why he should mislike him for a mate for his sister. And thereupon her Majesty's face changed, and she fell into a great rage—that if such a thing were so she had not been told of it. And as it so chanced, the Russian deputy and Mr. Secretary rode up at that moment; whereupon she asked the truth of what we had said, and the deputy dared not gainsay it. So she fell to rating him roundly that he should dare to demand a fair English maid for the hand

of a master who might, if minded, put her away in a month; and turning to Lisle, she bid him go to his sister and say that if she still kept to her wish to refuse the offer made her, she might e'en do so, as she herself would have no hand in such a scurvy piece of business. And so without trouble all was settled, and nobody a penny the worse save the poor deputy, who will not forget the Queen's rating, I take it, this many a day."

Thus another cloud matrimonial blew happily over, and Ivan the Czar was left lamenting the strange fact that a sister sovereign did not possess unlimited control over the lives and destinies of all her subjects; for to him was alleged the reluctance of the lady, and the decision of her family against the proposed alliance.

CHAPTER XII.

THE COURSE OF TRUE LOVE.

"OH, my lord, do not ask me. It could never, never be."

"Nay, sweetest Constance, say not so. Have I not told thee I love thee even as life itself? Is not love enough—love, and the devotion of a lifetime? for that thou shalt have, wilt thou but promise to be mine."

The speaker was Viscount Lisle, and he was pleading with all the eloquence of youth's first love. His face was irresistibly tender and earnest, and the liquid, dark eyes were full of mingled softness and fire. He pleaded as one who is not used to plead in vain, one who believes that he is not heard unmoved; and as he dropped to his knee and took in his own the soft white hand that was yielded to him with small reluctance, there was that in his face which seemed to speak of confidence and joy; yet when he raised his eyes to look at Constance, he saw that the tears were streaming down her cheeks.

"Nay, why weepest thou, sweetest lady?" he said, striving to press to his lips the hand he held; but Constance suddenly drew it away, and commanding herself by a

manifest effort, spoke with more calmness than she had hitherto been able to assume.

"Good my lord," she said with a quiet, inbred dignity not altogether unlike that which distinguished her father. "This thing can never be. I am not of your world, nor you of mine. The eagle mates not with the pigeon, nor the kestrel with the sparrow. Had it been otherwise with me, I will not say I might not have listened to you; and I thank you for the honour you have done me. But I am a simple city maiden, and you are, or will be, a peer of the realm. Such marriages tend not to happiness. We have had examples enow of that. I would not swell the ranks of those wives who have to choose between loneliness and neglect whilst their lords gaily ruffle it at the Court, or else see their husbands rewarded for their conjugal fidelity by being forgotten and flouted by former friends, and shut out for ever from that bright world wherein they have the right to disport themselves."

"Sweetest mistress, hear me," cried Lisle, speaking with a direct and noble purpose which gave an added beauty to his face, and added tenfold to the difficulties of the maiden's refusal. "What care I for Court friends or Court favour, so as I have thee ever at my side? I tell thee that I would lose all ten times over but to call thee mine. Sooner would I dwell with thee in some humble cot, than without thee in the fairest palace ever built by hands."

But she stayed him by a gesture, and answered sadly,—

"My lord, I believe that you speak in all good faith, and I thank you for the favour and the grace which I have

found in your sight. It is not that I do not give credence to your words. I verily believe they are spoken in all sooth. But I know were I to listen I should do you harm which nothing could repair. How could I bear to be the means of dragging you down to my level?"

"Nay, sweet Constance, the wife takes her husband's rank. As Lady Lisle you would make one of the fairest ornaments of Court, and men would crowd to do you homage, and give me joy on my choice."

But she answered slowly and sadly,—

"Pardon, my lord, but as Lady Lisle, the merchant's daughter, would be scorned and flouted, even as the jackdaw of the fable in the borrowed plumes."

"By my troth, if any dared to flout thee, my sword would avenge thee so as none should repeat the offence."

"Ay, and your first step would be to become embroiled with former friends; and when they were alienated, and the Court favour had waned, then would come the days when you would repent you of what you had done, and dub yourself a fool, as other gay gallants have done before you, for throwing all away for the sake of a pretty face. Nay, my lord, let me not have to refuse you again. I have said it can never be, and some day you will thank me for my firmness."

The viscount had grown pale with emotion. He had expected to encounter a certain amount of resistance, but hardly this tone of decision, all the more resolute from the fact that the maid did not attempt to deny her affection for him. Had it been that she knew not her own mind,

he might still have hoped; but the ground of her refusal was that of the inequality of rank, and nothing could bridge this gulf. Yet it was terribly hard to take "No" as a final answer; for never had the viscount so loved her as at this moment, when, having half admitted her partiality for him, she would listen to no word which should speak of future marriage.

"Constance, Constance," he said, "have pity. Would you ruin my life? I cannot live without you."

"My lord, you must learn to forget me. I would, for your sake, we had never met; though, for my own part, I would not forego the bitter-sweet thought that I have won so noble a love, albeit I may not accept it."

"And why may you not, when it is proffered in all honour?"

"My lord, were there no other reason, this must be sufficient for me: my father would never consent. Methinks you must know that for yourself. And without his blessing how could I ever wed?"

"Other women have dispensed with paternal sanction," answered Lisle. "For my own part, I should have to do the same."

"Ay, my lord, I have said naught of that; but well I knew that the Earl your father would equally withhold his blessing. And, sweet sir, I am but a simple maid, and have been simply brought up; but I have ever understood that honour to parents, as enjoined by God, is the first and holiest duty of the child. And my dear father has been the kindest and tenderest of parents, and methinks were I

to disobey him in this, or deceive or defy him, I could ask no blessing upon such a step, nor look for it to be blessed to either of us. Our duty to God and to our parents alike demands submission to lawful authority, and were I to be tempted by your fair words from the path of duty as it lies before me plain and simple, how could I look for such an act to bring with it either happiness or prosperity?"

Lisle did not reply to the question, nor did he smile at the simple reasoning. Indeed it struck home to his heart with a certain amount of force; for he, too, had been greatly beloved and indulged by a fond and proud father, and it seemed but an ill return for his goodness to wed in private a wife who, however richly dowered, would seem to his sire no fitting match for the head of the house of De Frene. So for a moment he remained sunk in deep thought, and then, looking suddenly up, he said,—

"Sweet Mistress Constance, it is hard to yield up hope, and I know not how to live without one gleam to guide me. Fortune's wheel hath many strange turns and twists. Tell me, fair maiden, suppose a day were to dawn when this match were not opposed by either of our fathers, would you then turn a deaf ear to my prayer? Would you then bid me go elsewhere for a wife?"

Her head was drooped low; a sigh fluttered between her lips.

"I fear me, my lord, that the hills will as soon melt as that such a thing should chance."

"But and if it did?"

For a moment she drooped her head still lower, and then as suddenly raising it, looked full into his eyes with a great light of love in her own.

"Were that day to come, my lord," she said, "then would I gladly lay my hand in yours, and go with you even to the world's end, an you would have it so."

The viscount once more took her hand, and dropping upon one knee beside her, carried it to his lips.

"I shall live in the hopes of that day," he said, an answering light shining in his eyes. "Stranger things have happened ere now. And till that happy day shall dawn fare thee well, sweet mistress. I shall never forget this promise of thine."

And ere she could speak another qualifying word he had saluted her upon the cheek and was gone, and she, standing at the window which overlooked the busy street, saw him mount his impatient steed, give one upward glance at the casement as if he knew she would be there, and then ride westward with a gallant grace of bearing which could not be matched, as she thought, in the length and breadth of the land.

The next day Lisle bade adieu to the Court for a time, and started for Hampshire in charge of his sister Alianora. The girl's health seemed to have been somewhat shaken by her fright with regard to the proposed marriage with his Muscovite Majesty, and there was no blinking the fact that she did not please the Queen. Her father had, therefore, deemed it wise to request permission for her to retire to the country for a while, and she was to be the guest of

Lady Willoughby, who was now located in a house of her own very near to Wyndgate Manor.

This arrangement for her comfort and well-being had been made by her husband prior to his departure for Denmark, whither he had been despatched on some diplomatic mission by the Queen. In order to meet the charges which he was expected to bear, and to secure a place of comfort for his wife in his absence, he had sold his house in the Minories, and some other lands, and had purchased a small and compact little property near to Romsey, hoping that the mild climate of South Hants would benefit his delicate wife, whilst from its close proximity to the Manor-house she would be able to enjoy the frequent companionship of Ursula, to whom she had taken so great a liking, and secure to herself some of the motherly care and skill in medicine for which Mrs. Furnival was famous.

It was a disappointment to Alianora that she was not to go "home," as she still called it; but her father had taken a dislike to the thought of his daughter's returning to the Furnival roof. He fancied that it was due to some fault in her training that she had been something of a failure at Court, and he was glad to accept an invitation from Lady Willoughby, as he felt that she was a more fitting guardian for his daughter. As a matter of fact, this invitation had been tendered at Ursula's suggestion, and the intercourse between the Manor and the Croft (as Lady Willoughby's house was called) was so frequent that there would be no real difficulty in being almost as much at one house as the other. And as, after a long day's riding, the brother

and sister ambled up the short avenue towards the smaller house, the chimneys and gables of the Manor were visible behind the green tracery of a little copse, and Alianora, turning with brightening eyes to her brother, exclaimed,—

"O Lisle, it is so good to be at home again."

"I grieve that we could not make the other home more home-like to thee, sweet sister," he replied a little sadly; but she laid her hand upon his, and answered with winning gentleness,—

"Nay, I meant no reproach in my words, dear brother; thou wert ever the bright spot in my life. But there can be no home to those who live amid the distractions of the Court; and I was not bred up to find solace in such gay scenes."

"Ay, verily, there is little true happiness to be had there," said Lisle with unwonted gravity. "Methinks I have found that out ere now; and I will henceforth live a man's part, and go forth to do good service for her Majesty, in lieu of dangling round her presence-chamber, the toy of her royal caprices. There are stirring scenes enow being enacted daily around us. I would e'en take a part in them, and look forward, perchance, in years to come, to settling down to a life of peace and repose, even amid such a fair scene as this."

His eye wandered round the peaceful landscape for a moment, and an unconscious sigh escaped him; but there was no time for farther musing, as the little cavalcade swept round the angle of the house, and came in view of a scene of quiet home life which was pleasant and restful to eyes used to the glamour and grandeur of the Court.

Beneath a spreading lime tree a couch had been placed, upon which lay the fragile Lady Willoughby, looking so white and transparent as to shock Alianora, who had not seen her for a year or more. A group of children played upon the grass beside her, watched over with motherly solicitude by the gentle Ursula, who seemed to be regarded almost as a second mother by them. The youngest of the little ones, a mere infant, lay upon her lap; and at the feet of the ladies, an open book upon his knee, sat Beauchamp, who was also a guest at the house, and divided his leisure time betwixt reading to the invalid and teaching the two eldest little boys—a labour of love alike to him and to them: to him because he was happy in this house, and would fain make himself of use; and to them because they loved their studies, and were well content with his gentle method of teaching.

Beauchamp had started with Lord Willoughby for Denmark as one of his suite, and had remained for some time with him there; but as his chief had been detained longer than had been anticipated by the business in hand, he had sent Beauchamp home with messages and despatches for his wife, and Lady Willoughby had kept him with her ever since, knowing how lonely was his life, and how fain he was to find a safe and peaceful haven for a time.

The joyous welcome accorded the travellers was in itself a source of refreshment to them. Alianora could not restrain her tears as she felt Ursula's fond arms about her, and though they were partly tears of joy, they could not at once be checked; and Lady Willoughby bade Ursula take

"the tired child" to her room, and see her safe into bed, which indeed was the only place she was fit for, and where she lay contentedly, holding Ursula fast by the hand.

"Tell me of Humphrey," she said, in a sort of whisper, when the first excitement had passed by. "I am sick for longing after news of him, and I have heard naught for so many a weary day."

"Nor we," answered Ursula; "but we must e'en abide in patience. We had news of his vessel once, and it was said she had made a good voyage, and had met with both plunder and fighting; but our uncle Gammage is wont to be absent on long cruises, yet he ever turns up safe and sound. And so thou hast not forgot Humphrey, sweet one, since thou hast been to Court, and heard compliments enow to turn half-a-dozen heads, by what our merry Barbara's letters tell us?"

But Alianora shrank back and shuddered at the bare thought of all she had endured.

"Ah, Ursula, if thou knewest how it irks and wearies me to hear and see it, when my heart is all the while with Humphrey, sick for the sound of his voice and the sight of his dear face! And my father is wroth with me that I will not listen when men say those things I can only hear from *his* lips; and there have been moments when he has said he will stand my 'folly' no longer, but marry me out of hand to the first gallant who shows himself ready to ask me. Were it not for my sweet brother, I know not how I should have lived through these weary years. And now, though perchance I may be left awhile in peace, I fear me

it cannot last, and that there are farther trials in store, unless—"

"Unless thy true love comes home crowned with glory and wealth, as he and we have dreamed," said Ursula fondly. "Well, dearest sister, we may e'en hope that so it will be; and as thy father is disappointed with thee at Court, perchance he will lend more favourable ear to Humphrey's suit when he comes home to lay his spoils at thy feet."

And comforted by these and many like fond words, Alianora fell asleep with Ursula's hand closely clasped in hers.

And what sweet waking it was on the morrow, so close to the dear old home, with Bess and Honora running over almost ere the breakfast was finished, carrying off Alianora to be kissed and comforted by "mother," the boys making much of her, and treating her with a mixture of brotherly affection and ceremonious courtesy that was pretty to see and delightful to receive. Long as had been the period of her absence, it soon seemed to Alianora as if she had never left the old home, and the light came back to her eye, the warm colour to her cheek, and Lady Willoughby would sigh and smile as she watched her, and ask to know the secret of her rapid restoration.

For it was patent to all eyes that the sweet lady herself was fading rapidly away. She did not speak of it, but often she lay looking out over the sunny landscape with an expression in her eyes which plainly told Ursula that she knew well she was not long for this world. She clung

more and more to her companion in her increasing weakness, and Mrs. Furnival was content to leave her daughter constantly beneath that roof. She herself was by this time greatly attached to the gentle invalid, and was the more tender over her from the belief that she would never live to see her lord's return. She was fading away so rapidly now that it seemed as if a few months must surely see the end.

Lisle's object of bringing his sister back and placing her in the keeping of Lady Willoughby being safely accomplished, there was nothing to detain him longer there, save that his hostess besought him not to hurry away, as he was looking as if he needed the fresh country air as much as Alianora. But Lisle was all in a fever to be up and doing, having taken a strange and sudden disgust for the life of a courtier, which he had hitherto led almost as a matter of course. The pressing need of the Provinces, and the glorious and desperate struggle for liberty being so heroically fought out there, was throwing its irresistible spell over him. He had resolved to delay no longer, but to fit out a small and gallant company at his own cost, go to the Prince of Orange, and offer to serve under his banner against the cruel and tyrant foes who were desolating so ruthlessly that fair territory.

He had hoped that Lord Willoughby would have returned, and that he might himself be bent on a like errand; but there was no immediate prospect of this, nor might he wish again to leave his sick wife or helpless children even if he did return ere he was looked for:

but when the viscount spoke with flashing eye and impetuous energy of the part he hoped to play in that ever-increasing struggle of might against right, Beauchamp's dreamy face lighted up with a new energy and purpose, and he cried out,—

"I would I might be one of your band, good Lisle. I too am tired of inaction, and would fain show the world that I can strike a blow for that fair goddess Liberty."

"Marry, and why not?" quoth Lisle eagerly. "I would fain have you for a comrade in arms. In sooth, these are no times to waste one's young manhood in dreaming and toying. The clouds are lowering over our horizon. Men hear the muttering of the distant storm. Those who should know him best report that the Most Catholic King, as he loves to be called, is making a league with the Roman pontiff, and there can bode no good to Protestant England in that. The storm may yet be far off—the peace continues, and may continue long; but none can tell when the first thunder-clap will break upon us. And I, for my part, would fain be found sword in hand—a soldier not unversed in the art of war in its grim reality. So I go to the land where the sword is unsheathed, and unsheathed against the foe that will some day throw off the mask and show himself in his true colours. And if you too pant for action, and for a life wider than that which we can find here, why, come you then with me, and we will stand side by side in the battle, and show that a student and a gallant can unsheathe sword to some purpose when the time for action comes."

Beauchamp's face lighted up with the enthusiasm caught from his companion, yet he returned no definite reply then; and it was not until some days had passed by that he unburdened himself to his friend of the secret in his mind.

"I fain would come with you—I fain would learn the art of war, and show that I can be something more than a mere dreamer; and yet there are cords about my heart that seem dragging me back, and I know not what to say or what to do. When I left *her* to go with my Lord Willoughby to Denmark, she pined away to a shadow for fear I should not return, or that meantime her father should come back to claim her and wed her elsewhere, or wish to do so. And how to tell her I must needs go again I know not; whilst to live on thus, daily meeting, yet daring not to speak or show our love—in faith, it is more than I can endure. Tell me, good Lisle, what wouldst thou do in a like case?"

A few months ago Lisle might have made some light reply, but his own recent experience had taught him sympathy and comprehension, and although Beauchamp had indulged in no lover's raptures, face and voice alike showed him to be very much in earnest.

"What would I do in like case?" questioned the viscount readily. "Marry, if I cannot soon tell thee that! I would wed my fair lady in secret ere I left, an I could not wed her openly; and thus should I leave her, knowing naught could come between us, and that if it so chanced I was detained thither, and our separation must be long, I had power to send for her to me,—thus taking from her

the worst fear, and from myself the dread of what might chance were I not there to claim her."

Beauchamp suddenly raised his head and looked at his companion. "I would I might e'en follow such advice, but yet thou knowest that secret marriages have not boded well for our race."

"You speak sooth there, good lad; yet methinks thou art in no farther fear of the royal displeasure, nor would your fair lady be in the power of her Majesty, as were your luckless aunt and mother. But an you will tell me the name and rank of the lady, I can give you the better counsel. Is it any maid of these parts, where thou hast been dallying so long?"

"Thou rememberest Mistress Honora Rogers?"

"What! the sweet songstress who sang the welcome to her Majesty when she was in these parts some three years back? Ay, marry I do, and a sweet damsel in all truth was she. And so it is her heart thou hast won? Well, her father is a kindly and honest gentleman of good repute; why not ask her hand from him, and wed her before all the world, an he will have thee?"

"I would fain do so, but that he is away, and no man knows when he may return. He is in Spain, and is moving from place to place, and his daughter knows not when she will see his face again."

"Knows he of your loves?"

"I verily believe he doth; but his visits have been but brief, and I saw him not upon the last. Methinks he would not refuse us, an he saw his daughter's heart set on

it; but it is very likely he would liefer see her wed to one upon whom no such cloud hangs as upon me. Yet I would ask him an I could, and if the maiden pleaded likewise I scarce think he would say us nay."

"And in his absence who hath the care of the maid?"

"Why, her good aunt and uncle Furnival, whom you know right well; but they would never consent without knowing her father's pleasure in the matter. And if we wait for that, which means we wait till his return—"

"Ay, truly, whilst the grass grows the steed starves; and whilst the lady waits her father's leave, the lover goes to the wars, and she pines away in uncertainty. I know the whimsies of the pretty things, and I would e'en, were I you, make fast the knot before I go. Then she will know that none can gainsay her claim to call herself thy wife, whereby the worser half of her misery will be allayed; and thou wilt go forth with the braver heart, knowing that no man can come betwixt you."

Beauchamp drew a long breath and his eye kindled.

"If I could think it would be doing her no injury! I would I could make all thus sure."

"Then ask the maid herself," said Lisle. "If her father be not altogether adamant, and if her kind kinsfolk are as fond of thee as erst they used to be, I see not that the maid would have such hard times even did they discover all. She is of age to please herself; and if her kinsfolk would scruple to do it publicly, why, let her take the law between her own hands and give herself away in private. I would I could but follow thy example." And Lisle, who had

added these words beneath his breath, drew a long sigh, which Beauchamp may be pardoned for not hearing in his absorption.

"I will speak to her this very day," said he.

"Ay, do so; for if it be done it were best done quickly, and we must not dally here if we are to take the field this summer beside the noble Prince of Orange."

"And if it be so that she consents, where and how can it be done in such fast fashion that no man can call in question its legality?"

"I will see to that for thee, and be thy witness and thy supporter, and the maid had better bring some friend or cousin of her own on her side. Thou art no good for such matters—thy wits will be all astray; but I have aided in such like pretty sports before this, and know well how to plan them. Make it good with your sweet lady, and I will do the rest."

It was no uncommon thing, as the evening light began to wane in the sky, for Honora to steal out alone to wander, as Alianora used to do, beside the deep mill-pool and along the quiet margin of the stream, and it was thither that Beauchamp's steps often led him, as if a magnet guided them. So there was no surprise in the look of sweet, shy welcome with which Honora saw him approach this particular June evening; and though the colour rose for a moment in her fair cheek, it as quickly faded, and she looked up at him with something of trouble in her dewy eyes.

"Edward," she said softly; for when they were alone

together he had begged her to address him thus, and the name fell naturally from her lips now,—"Edward, is it true what they are saying of thee—that thou art going with Lord Lisle to the Provinces in few days' time, to join the army of the prince, and fight the Spaniard there?"

"And if it were so, sweetheart, wouldst thou grieve for me?" he asked tenderly; and there was something like reproach in her glance as she replied,—

"Dost thou need to ask that, Edward?"

"And yet, my heart's love, it is weary waiting for this war which comes not, and my manhood chafes beneath inaction. I cannot tarry here much longer. Already some rumour hath reached my father, and his letters of late have been full of displeasure at my doings, and I know not what he may think fit to order next. Thou knowest that he is a hard man, and hath learned no tolerance by the misfortunes of his early life. An he were to hear what keepeth me prisoner here, I know not what he might do. It were better to be away, serving the Queen by striking at her foes in a foreign land, than to be sent for to his house, there to be spied upon and watched. Hast thou not said that wert thou a man thou wouldest go thyself?"

"Ay, verily, could I go at thy side," answered Honora very low.

The words and the look with which they were accompanied gave a sudden impulse to the young lover's resolution as he suddenly took the girl in his arms, and whilst he held her thus, he whispered long and earnestly

into her ear. She seemed at first to shrink and falter, but afterwards listened more quietly, and even with a certain sort of eagerness, though she freed herself from the clasp of his arms, and stood looking down into the placid water, with a glow like that in the western sky reflected in her face.

"I would I knew what my dear father would say," she said at last.

"I verily believe he would bid thee act as for thy best happiness. And if thou wouldest rather be free, since I must leave thee, that if aught comes betwixt us—"

But she lifted her hand quickly.

"Nought but death *can* come betwixt thee and me, Edward," she said, a strange deep light in her eyes; "and whilst I am here waiting for thee, it would be happiness indeed to feel that thou wert mine in very sooth. But I know not if I ought. I would I knew my duty. It were an ill part of me to pain my sweet aunt, and yet I know she would not dare to give me leave in my father's absence; and she would but be the more resolute, because she loves thee almost as a son, and would fear that she was led by her love rather than her judgment. She has blamed herself ere this, I have heard, in that she let us be so much together years agone, when thou camest to us sick and wounded. I trow her soft heart would melt when she saw how constant had been our love; yet none the less would she be firm, and even if she were won over, my uncle would say his duty to me bid him keep us apart until my father's will could be known."

"Ay, and yet thy father would not stand against our happiness?"

"My father took me in his arms ere he went away, and told me that his chiefest care was my happiness. I trow well he had some thought of thee in his mind, albeit I believe he hoped I still might forget thee. And oh, to feel that I was thine own wife! I know not how it is, but when thou art away it is not death I fear, but that far crueller death—the separation that man can inflict. If I knew no man could come betwixt us, I could wait for thy return even with that calm that other wives do for their absent husbands."

"And I should not return to find thee wasted to a shadow," said Beauchamp fondly, as he bent his face to hers. "Then, sweetheart, say the word, and I will make thee mine ere I go. I shall be brave for thy sake, and the thought of thee will give me power and victory; and when I return with my poor laurels to lay at thy feet, no man will think harshly of us that we have loved so well. Have I not waited years for thee? and has not time but drawn the bands of our love closer?"

And so Honora was slowly won, though with many flutterings and moments of anxious doubt. It was not her nature to favour concealment, but in this matter of her love she had grown used to the sense of secrecy (although by this time it was growing an open secret), and she did not think the match would be openly opposed by any of her kindred when her happiness was known to be at stake.

But what she really feared, and feared so much that it

preyed upon her mind, and made Beauchamp's absences terrible to her, was the possible conduct of Lord Hertford, a man of iron will and implacable temperament, who was said to have an eye on his son, and to desire him to help to restore the fallen fortunes of the house by some marriage of wealth or ambition. He had noticed the lad but little in his youth, and had been anything but a kind father, and what his present plans might be no one knew, and only rumours had reached the frightened girl through Lady Willoughby's correspondents; but this little had been quite enough to terrify her greatly. So that when her lover begged her to consent to a private marriage before he left for the Provinces, she felt that if she had but the right to style herself his wife, the worst of her fears would be laid at rest; and there was romance enough in the girl's composition to give a charm to the notion of secret wedlock, could she but feel she was not acting wrongly in the matter. Perhaps her conscience was a little elastic where her lover was concerned; but she truly believed that were her father there to be consulted, he would not deny his blessing: and so, ere Beauchamp had to leave her, he had her promise, gladly given; and she returned to the house in a kind of dream, scarce able to believe that ere another week had passed over her head, she should be indeed the wife of her true and faithful love, albeit a wife who might not so own herself in the present.

Yet inasmuch as some confidante seems needful to a girl at such a crisis of her life, and she and Bess had drawn so very closely together in bonds of more than

sisterly love, ere sleep closed their eyes that very night the secret had been whispered into her ears, and listened to with deepest sympathy; and though Bess was as averse to concealment as ever Honora could be, she was loyal and stanch where she had been trusted, and would never betray a secret which had been confided to her as such.

Moreover, Bess took the view that Honora was now of age to please and judge for herself; and although her uncle and aunt might, if consulted, feel it their duty to oppose the marriage until Sir Roger's consent could be obtained, yet that if Honora felt certain of this in her own mind, it were kinder perhaps to spare her temporary guardians the pain of gainsaying her. Bess had seen something of the effects of weary, hopeless waiting in Alianora's case, and she knew too much of Honora's innermost heart not to share her apprehensions for the future, and her longing for some kind of certainty. There was the element of romance dear to the heart of youth in the thought that Honora would be Lady Beauchamp and a wedded wife, whilst her young husband was fighting for fame and glory under the banner of one of the world's greatest patriots; and so, thus talking and thus musing, they fell asleep in each other's arms, and Honora woke to the feeling that a great step had been taken in life, and that a strange crisis was at hand.

The next days passed in a sort of fever betwixt happiness and dread. But Bess was a great comfort to the fluttering Honora, for she, having once made up her mind that the thing was to be done, went calmly about her daily

work, covering her companion's abstraction and fits of causeless sorrow or joy, and being more than a sister to her in loving counsel; whilst Mrs. Furnival, knowing that Beauchamp was about to leave the country in company with Lord Lisle, thought that she understood only too well the cause of her niece's fluctuations of spirit and neglect of daily duties. So she passed all over in silence, giving her unwonted liberty to come and go as she would, feeling that possibly these were the last hours those two faithful hearts would ever have to spend together: for a pall of uncertainty hung over the future, and many of the gallant soldiers who had started forth on a like errand had fallen by the swords of the Spaniards ere they had seen their native lands again.

And thus it came about that without difficulty or any false seeming on their part, the two girls went forth one bright June morning immediately after the early breakfast, and when they returned some hours later no questions were asked. Mrs. Furnival marvelled not that Honora's eyes were strangely bright, and that she flitted restlessly from place to place, as if some spirit of motion were within her; but she did wonder that there was so much of triumph and so little of sadness in her face,—for it was the last day of the viscount's stay in the county, and early next morning he and Beauchamp were to ride forth to London to make ready forthwith for the voyage to the Hague.

She knew that one or both the youths would certainly come over to bid adieu ere they departed, and it surprised her not that Honora could not remain quiet, so she

troubled her not over any household task that day, but let her wander whither she would, and was glad to note that she clung to Bess, and sought not solitude wherein to grieve. Yet she would have been surprised could she have heard the burden of the maiden's song, or seen the passionate fervour with which she kissed from time to time a golden ring which she wore suspended round her neck, well hidden away from view.

"Ah, Bess, I am so happy—so happy. I know not how to contain the joy of my heart. He is mine now—mine for life or death. And I am his; and what God hath joined together man may not put asunder. Tell me, sweet cousin, that it be not wrong so to love, for it seemeth to me as if heaven itself had opened before mine eyes this day. I almost fear to let myself think of it, it is so sweet, so wonderful."

"Nay, dearest, why shouldst thou fear? Is it not God who hath put into our hearts this wondrous power of love? And if we take it as His good gift, and let it not stand betwixt ourselves and Him, we need not fear that it will become idolatry. I am happy in thy happiness, sweet Honora, and would have thee make the most of it; for it cannot be but that anxiety and trouble lie before thee, and perchance these hours of pure happiness are given thee to strengthen thee for what may be coming."

"And I will be strong to bear it, be it what it may," answered the girl with earnest resolution, looking away over the valley, and fixing her eyes, full of strange and beautiful light, on the rose-red clouds of the west. "I have

lived through the worst, when I feared he might be taken from me; now that he is mine for ever, I can rest in peace. He may be in peril, like so many other brave men; but I come of a soldier's race, and I would not hold him back from his duty or the call of an oppressed country. So he is mine, I can wait in hope and content. And whether he live, I may go to him; and whether he die, I have won the right to mourn for him: therefore I have gained immeasurably every way, and I will gladly bear all that the future may hold, in thanks for this great boon."

And in this mood Honora's lover found her, when he stood beside her in the faint sweet light 'twixt twilight and moonrise, and held her hand in his under cover of that semi-darkness; whilst not far away there were merry voices in farewell speeches, wishing well to Lord Lisle, and foretelling him glory and renown.

"My wife—my bride!" murmured Beauchamp in her ear in impassioned accents; and she, lifting her fair, sweet face to him with a world of tender love in her eyes, had but one word to speak in answer, and that word was "Husband."

There were no tears shed on that parting, as there had been, at least in secret, on other like occasions; for the strange sweet bond which now linked them together gave them strength to bear this separation more calmly than before.

"I will come back to you anon, sweet wife, and claim you as mine own before the world;" and she looked at him with her star-like gaze, and answered,—

"Fare you well, my dear, dear husband. God grant you a prosperous voyage and a safe return; and whenever you come you will find your wife awaiting you with her welcome."

One kiss, one hasty but passionate embrace, and they had parted, and Honora was looking after him as he rode away, with her soul in her eyes; and Lisle was musing to himself on the turn these lovers' affair had taken, and wondering if the course of his true love would ever run as smoothly.

CHAPTER XIII.

TROUBLED DAYS.

"GOOD wife, thou art wanted. There is trouble at the Croft. A lad hath been sent down in all haste by our Ursula to summon thee. By what I make from his story, the Lady Willoughby hath broke some vessel in the lungs, and is like to die ere help can reach her."

Mrs. Furnival rose quickly to her feet, and Honora and Bess did the same. Although some such news as this had been long looked for, it came, as it ever does, with a shock of surprise; but Mrs. Furnival's presence of mind never deserted her upon any emergency.

"Honora," she said, "thou hadst best come with me. We shall need thy skill in the sick-chamber, and Ursula will have enough to do in taking care of the poor bairns, who I fear will soon be motherless.—Bess, thou must bide here, and do as best thou canst for thy father and brothers and the household in my absence; for methinks I shall scarce be spared so long as that feeble spark of life burns. Ursula must not be left alone with such a charge. I must needs be with her until the end, which I fear cannot be far off now."

Honora was as quick in her preparations as her aunt, and the two were soon hastening together across the field path, which led direct to Lady Willoughby's house. And as they reached the door, an old servant came hurrying out to meet them, her eyes red with weeping, her cheeks still wet with tears.

"Thank God you are come, good mistress," she said, "for the sweet lady is sinking fast. I knew it boded no good when I heard the raven croak on the housetop three nights following, and when Betsy spilled the salt across the threshold of the back-door, like the foolish wench she is I said to her then that it would bring trouble; and so it has before three days have gone by."

"Nay, now, fill not thine own mind or that of thy serving-wenches with such idle tales," said Mrs. Furnival in a tone of gentle reproof. "Knowest thou not that the issues of life and death are in the hands of the great God of heaven and earth, who orders all things according to His holy will? Cease, then, to put faith in these superstitions, only worthy of pagan times, and pray God to ease the dark passage for thy sweet mistress. And take me now to her room without farther parley; I would see for myself how it is with her."

But Mrs. Furnival had scarce crossed the threshold of the room before she saw that she had only come in time to witness the end. The leech, who had chanced to be on his way to pay his daily visit when the catastrophe happened, had done all that his skill could accomplish, and was about to take his leave.

"It can but be a question of a few hours now, madam," he said, as he encountered Mrs. Furnival at the door; "and all that my poor skill can make shift to do hath been done for her relief. I leave her in the best hands; and she is wonderfully calm and collected."

With a bow he passed on his way, and Mrs. Furnival went to the bedside, to receive a look of gratitude and thanks from the dim eyes of the patient.

Ursula, who looked white and shaken, was firmly and kindly dismissed by her mother, and placed under Honora's care, whilst she herself took her seat beside the bed, and endeavoured by every means in her power to relieve the oppression under which the patient laboured so painfully.

Her efforts were crowned with better success than those of the leech had been. The intense exhaustion yielded somewhat, and Lady Willoughby looked up with grateful eyes, signing to Mrs. Furnival to come very close to her, as she desired to whisper a few words, and could only do so in the lowest possible voice.

Mrs. Furnival would fain have checked her altogether, fearing a return of the bleeding; but it seemed as if there were something on the patient's mind which must needs be spoken, and bit by bit, far more slowly and incoherently than will bear repetition, was the charge given and accepted which pressed so heavily on the mother's mind as she lay dying.

It was of her children that she thought. Her lord was absent in a distant land. Her own relatives might be

ready to show kindness to the little ones, but she had long been parted from her home and kindred, and knew not with what treatment they would meet if they were taken away to some unknown house amongst strangers. She had so loved and lived for them that their training had been different from what was common in those days; and it was terrible to her to think of them subjected to a stern, or capricious, or unloving rule; and yet who could warrant that this might not be, were they taken away by kinsfolk, who must almost of necessity regard their coming as a source of trouble and annoyance?

But Mrs. Furnival had no sooner grasped what was preying on the dying lady's mind before, in the largeness of her heart, she had found a welcome remedy.

"Have no fears for the dear children. They shall not be removed from hence until the return of their father. With your good leave I will take upon myself the office of guardian, and will bring them to Wyndgate Manor, there to remain beneath my care and that of Ursula until Lord Willoughby returns to decide what must be done. We love them for their own sakes and for thine, and would not that they should be sent to strangers so long as we have a home to offer them. Our nurseries have been but too long empty; I would fain see them filled once again. The lads are growing fine and manly youths, and it will soon be needful to settle something for their future; but for the four little ones, they may well remain with us so long as their father wills it. My husband often laments that we have no longer any children upon the place; he

will be as ready as I am to give them a present home with us."

A liquid light shone in the mother's eyes; she pressed the kind hand she held, and her words of thanks, though few and faint, expressed such plenitude of gratitude as clearly showed how great had been the burden thus removed. For long afterwards she remained silent, resting and recovering her strength. Then as the light changed, and the lengthening shadows spoke of the approach of evening, and Honora entered to bring her some delicate nourishment prepared by her own hands, she intimated a wish to see her children once again, and they came in together—first two sturdy, well-grown boys of twelve and ten, and then three younger children with more of infantile look and lack of comprehension. The six-months-old infant was borne in Ursula's arms; and as the girl held it for the mother's last kiss, her own tears dropped thick upon its sleeping face.

Lady Willoughby saw them, and gave a tender look at the girl.

"Thou wilt be a mother to it?" she breathed faintly; and with something of a sob Ursula replied,—

"Oh, I will—I will—so far as in me lies."

The answer she received was a strange but very sweet smile; and after the children had gone, clinging to Ursula, as if indeed they felt her to be in some sort a second mother, Lady Willoughby's eye followed her to the door, and then turned with a strange look upon Mrs. Furnival. It was so evident that she wished to say something, that

her nurse again bent low over her to hear her faintly-spoken words.

"If it should be so—as I cannot but hope—you would not oppose it for her?" she gasped.

Mrs. Furnival did not understand, and anxious as she was to hinder much talking, she was obliged to say as much. Again Lady Willoughby gathered herself together and spoke.

"I have pondered over it so often—I have learned to wish it so much—that there is nothing strange to me in the thought. My dear lord is yet young. He will need a mother's love for his children. He is not one of your gay Court gallants; he loves his home and the ties some men hold so cheap. Time will come when he will choose anew; and I have noted his friendship for your sweet Ursula, and have said in my heart, Would it might be such an one as herself. Methinks when he returns to find her so much to our little ones, and knows all that she hath been to me, he will e'en feel tenfold more gratitude than before, and—and—but my words fail me. I cannot speak more. Tell me but one thing. Were this to be, you would not say them nay or withhold your blessing? For without that I think she would never say yea, even did her heart incline thereunto."

This was not all spoken at once, but by degrees, so that Mrs. Furnival had full time to enter into the meaning of the strange petition. She had not thought of such a thing before, yet her experience of life told her that a man like Lord Willoughby, with six young children depending upon

him, was not likely to remain a widower very long; and certainly, were he looking about for a wife, her maternal love and pride told her he might do worse than let his choice fall upon Ursula, who had been so devoted to his wife in her last illness, and had given already almost a mother's love to the children. In those days it was no unfrequent thing for a man or woman to marry again within a few months of the death of a first spouse; not that their affection was of necessity less, or their grief at their loss feigned, but that the exigencies of the time sometimes forbade long waiting, and made a new alliance speedily advisable.

So it seemed that if this thing were to happen, it might happen ere a year had passed by; and Mrs. Furnival had to adjust her mind to a new idea somewhat rapidly. But after turning the situation over in her thoughts for a few minutes, she had her reply in readiness, and spoke with the gentle decision and kindliness so characteristic of her.

"It seemeth something strange, sweet lady, thus to speak when the life still remains in thy body; and yet I am a mother, and can well feel for a mother who is leaving behind her best beloved, and would fain have some security as to their happiness. And if this thing that thou hast dreamed of should come to pass, and if our maid should be inclined thereunto, as is not unlikely, seeing how she loveth the children, and that my Lord Willoughby is a loyal and gallant gentleman, such as any woman might be proud to love and honour, there shall be no let or hindrance upon our part. She shall choose for herself, and act as her heart bids her. I trow my husband and I

would welcome the little ones as our grandchildren by adoption; and if thy good lord should ever need a home for them during his absences on foreign service, Wyndgate Manor will ever be open to them, and we will love them as our own."

A light of something almost akin to rapture shone in the dying eyes, and Lady Willoughby clasped her hands together.

"God be praised and blessed!" she murmured. "He hath given me everything my heart craved, save a last loving word from my dear lord, and I can rejoice that he is saved that pain. We shall meet again where partings are no more.—'Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace –in peace.' O Lord, I thank and praise Thee." Then after a few moments, in which she seemed absorbed in prayer, she looked round and said faintly,—

"Ursula."

Mrs. Furnival went quietly to the door and called in her daughter; and holding fast by that loving hand, the gentle Lady Willoughby turned upon her pillows with a little sigh, and ere they knew it her spirit had fled.

It is an old saying that troubles never come singly. The family had scarce settled again at the Manor-house, bringing with them the six motherless children of Lord and Lady Willoughby, as well as Alianora, who had received her father's consent to return to her old home, pending farther arrangements with regard to her future, before a new trouble fell upon that household, and one which seemed for the time to crush it to the very dust.

Humphrey's long absence and silence had before now awakened some anxiety in the mind of his family; but in those days of imperfect communication and uncertain navigation it was no unusual thing for a few years to elapse without news of sea-wanderers; and there had been one packet of letters, brought home by a sister vessel, which had assured those at home of a prosperous voyage so far. But some time had passed since then, and now it seemed as if more news ought to be forthcoming. Alianora was drooping beneath the long uncertainty, whilst the mother's heart was often sick with the anxious yearning after her first-born. The father sometimes said that if Humphrey once got safely home he should never go to sea again. He could not spare a boy of his for long years together without knowledge of his welfare. And Ursula and the other girls echoed the sentiment, and wished that Humphrey had elected service in the Provinces, as there was constant communication between that country and England, and they would have been spared the wearing doubt and suspense. But the days of waiting were drawing to a close, to be followed by anguish which made them wish that they had still remained in the old uncertainty.

It was growing dusk upon a close summer evening, when Gilbert, who had been out after supper, came racing back to the hall to say that there were travellers upon the road who appeared to be making for the Manor-house. Whether or no this was the case, travellers on the road at that hour could not be allowed to pass by without some proffer of hospitality, provided there was nothing smack-

ing of seminary priest or Jesuit in their look. And Mr. Furnival went out to reconnoitre, whilst Alianora sat with hands tightly locked together, gazing out of the window, her heart beating to suffocation; for she never heard the sound of horse-hoofs without but she thought of Humphrey and his possible return. Surely it was possible it might be he, coming home laden with the rich spoil which should win him the smile of the Queen and the favour of her father, who had been so far disappointed in her that he would be less likely to oppose her marriage with a plain esquire than he would have been a few years ago, when he was full of plans for mating her with some scion of a noble house. And even whilst she thus mused—the thoughts racing through her mind without volition of her own—the quick-sighted Honora had caught sight of one of the approaching figures, and she sprang to her feet, crying hastily,—

"It is our uncle Gammage; verily it is he, and none other!"

"Then Humphrey will not be far behind," cried Ursula, springing up; whilst Alianora trembled so violently that she was unable to follow the others to the door, but remained where she was, leaning against the window-frame, devouring with her eyes the figures of the riders as they slowly approached the door, and repeating to herself as one in a dream,—

"He is coming—he is coming! Oh, why comes he not first?"

But he came not first nor last. There were eight in all

who, in perfect silence, rode up to the hospitable door; and when Alianora had time to think of aught, it was this silence which struck upon her heart like lead, and drove the blood from her cheek, whilst it all surged in her ears, till she felt as if the sea itself must be breaking round the house. There was the burly figure of a bronzed man in middle life, and with him some who looked like his ship's company, together with servants with heavy loads on pack-horses; but no Humphrey—no Humphrey! And still Alianora moved not, nor did she let herself think what this might bode.

"He will come to-morrow; he hath stayed by the ship. He hath gone to London straight, thinking to find me there. He will come anon—he will come ere long."

So she said over and over again, whilst without, beyond the threshold came the sound of low voices, pitched in that key which ever seems to suggest thoughts of terror or of death. Yet she heard not and heeded not, but remained where she was, saying over and over again these words, as if to cheat herself into belief of them.

And then Ursula seemed to detach herself from the group by the door, and to come forward out of a sort of mist. Her face was white as death, and there was a strained look of agony in her eyes. Far away as it seemed, there was a sound of weeping and wailing in the air; but Ursula did not weep, nor did Honora, who likewise came to Alianora, and led her gently away. The servants were crowding into the hall. There was a bustle and tumult going on which precluded any kind of quiet talk. The

three girls passed upstairs into the chamber which was shared betwixt Alianora and Ursula, and then Alianora turned and looked at them, passing her hand across her eyes.

"Tell me," she said.

Ursula, usually so calm, broke suddenly into a hard, tearless sob, and buried her face in her hands, trembling from head to foot.

"He is dead," said Alianora, with the calmness of one who is stunned by some heavy blow; and at that Ursula threw herself upon the bed in a strange frenzy of passion, crying out in strangled tones—"Would God he were! Would God we knew that he *was* dead!"

Alianora turned her dilated eyes upon Honora, who, though perfectly white and rigid, as if from horror, still retained her outward calmness. Her pity for Alianora was so intense—for she knew well what such news must mean to her—that all thought but of how best to break it had for the moment left her.

"Honora, why wilt thou not tell me that he is dead?"

"We do not know that he is so, dearest Alianora; he—"

"If he were not dead he would have come back to me."

"God in His great mercy grant that he may yet do so, sweetest Alianora; but he cannot do so whilst he remains a prisoner in the hands of those who captured him. And good Uncle Gammage tells us that in an encounter they had with a Spanish ship-of-war, which pursued them in order to retake the treasure they had captured from a rich galleon, Humphrey fell into the hands of the enemy and

before they could do aught to succour him, the sudden tropical night had fallen upon them, and ere morning dawned a wind had sprung up which parted the ships, and they never saw their foe again."

Alianora's eyes were fixed upon Honora's face. It seemed doubtful how far she realized what this might mean.

"And they left him there?—they deserted him? I cannot believe it of any English sailor."

"Dearest, they are not to blame. They did every single thing that human skill could do to come up with the ship, resolved even to yield up the whole booty, so as they had Humphrey back again; but foul weather and hurricanes prevailed, and they never sighted the ship. Yet they would not give up, but pursued it to the very shores of Spain, whither they imagined it was bent, and there all that they could learn was—"

Honora paused. Ursula was shivering strongly, her tearless sobs seeming as if they would tear her in pieces. Alianora looked from one to the other, a great and terrible horror replacing the bewilderment of her previous expression. She put out her hand and clutched that of Honora, swaying slightly as if she had received a heavy blow.

"What did they learn? only tell me that."

"Only this," answered Honora, commanding herself with difficulty, "that all heretic prisoners taken by Spanish ships were handed over, as soon as port was made, to the officers of the Inquisition."

Alianora looked for one moment into Honora's eyes, her

own slowly dilating, and then with a sudden sharp, short cry, she fell senseless to the ground.

Possibly that blessed period of oblivion, and the utter exhaustion of nature which followed, was the most merciful thing for her. There were those who could wish that their anguish of mind could be allayed by temporary oblivion. Had Humphrey fallen in fight, the loss would have been sore, the grief of his loving family great; but the terrible mystery which now shrouded his fate, and the horrors of which he might be the helpless victim, were such as none dared to speak of, albeit none could think for days of aught beside: and the hopelessness of ever learning what his fate would be forbade even the faintest glimmer of hope to lighten the darkness of their grief. Dead to them and his country they knew he must be, nor did they dare to cherish even the faintest hope of seeing his face again. A prisoner of war might be exchanged or ransomed, but a heretic, upon whom the dark portals of the Inquisition had closed, was lost to all the world from that day forward. It was unspeakably, unutterably terrible, and silver hairs began to show beneath the mother's coif, and her eyes told a tale of wakeful nights and restless days of misery. But Alianora's critical state engrossed her faculties, and helped her to bear up against the crushing blow; whilst Ivo and Gilbert ground their teeth in furious anger, and vowed that with their parents' consent they would scour the seas for news of their brother, and carry him off even from the dungeons of the Holy Office.

Gammage, who felt the loss only second to the parents,

and had spent almost a year as it was in hopeless and fruitless search, applauded nevertheless the spirit of the youths; but it was obviously out of the question for them to leave home at present. One son had been lost in a manner far worse than death through his hazarding himself upon the sea, and for the parents to be willing to send their other sons on a like errand was surely too much to expect from human nature. So the bereaved household settled down to its loss, and by slow degrees grew used even to the horror of the thought of Humphrey's fate, though it left a lasting mark on many of them from which they could never recover.

Ursula's best comfort was in the children, left now almost solely to her care. Her mother and Honora nursed Alianora, who was seldom sufficiently herself to know who was with her, or to ask for Ursula; and in the vehement indignation of the little boys, their ardent promise "to grow up fast and go and get cousin Humphrey out of prison," and in the clinging fondness of the little ones, who were just able to understand that "Mother Ursula," as they had dubbed her of their own accord, was in trouble and needed cheering, she did find some measure of comfort. So though a dark cloud had fallen upon her, she did not feel that all the sweetness of life had been on that account taken away.

"It will not be the last trouble, you will see," said the old nurse, who remained with the children, and who had by no means followed the hint given her with regard to the folly of idle superstitions: "when there is two, there is

always three likewise, before they finish coming. We shall not be safe from harm till the third has come; and the white owls do not hoot round the house of a night for naught. They will not leave till they have brought more woe."

"The owls come out a good deal always at this time of year," replied Honora, to whom this gloomy prognostication was spoken; but the old woman shook her head mysteriously, and bade the young lady look to herself, for she had looked at the new moon for the first time through glass, to the speaker's certain knowledge—she had been with the children when it happened, and had remarked upon it—and that was a sure sign of ill-luck. Honora smiled at the old woman's superstitions; yet she felt a curious thrill when at supper a few nights later a serving-maid entered the hall in haste, and said that a despatch had just that moment arrived for Mistress Honora from the Lord Lisle, and that his servant waited still in the saddle to know if there were any answer for him to take back.

All eyes were instantly turned upon the girl, who first flushed and then grew pale; but the hand she held out for the missive did not tremble, and she broke the seal and read it in dead silence.

The servants had by this time retired, and the family were alone at the board, so that there was nothing to hinder the girl from speaking as she would. She looked up from the paper, a strange light in her eyes, and said,—

"It is to say that Lord Beauchamp, on his way from

London to Dover, was waylaid and stopped in the Queen's name, and carried off a prisoner they know not whither."

"And why hath my Lord Lisle troubled thee with this news?" asked Mr. Furnival, drawing his brows together in perplexity. "Methinks it is no concern of thine."

"I crave your pardon, good uncle," said Honora, lifting her face towards him with an expression upon it which riveted every eye. "It concerneth me so deeply that I must work night and day to obtain his release; for I am his lawfully-wedded wife. And methinks it may be his loyal love for me which hath drawn upon him the anger of her Majesty. That anger it is for his wife to allay."

Had a thunderbolt fallen in that hall it could hardly have produced greater sensation.

"His wife!" murmured Mrs. Furnival, falling back in her chair.

"His wife! Thou rebellious wench! how daredst thou thus peril thy good name, and that whilst thou wert beneath our roof?" stormed Mr. Furnival, who was for the moment surprised into a burst of wrath. "How now, saucy vixen? what hast thou to say for thyself? Hast thou been so ill done by beneath this roof that thou must fly into the arms of the first meddling young coxcomb upon whom thine eye rests, and e'en fling thyself to him, as thou wert to be had for the whistling, like a tame falcon? I trow thy good father will be cut to the heart at such news. And how knowest thou such wedlock was lawful? Now out on thee for a bold, forward minx! Beshrew me if I turn thee not from my doors to go find

this gay young husband of thine, and see what welcome thou wilt get from him."

But Honora was in no wise crushed by this torrent of angry words. Parental wrath was wont then to expend itself somewhat more freely than is common now; and though she rose and knelt humbly at her uncle's feet as she made her reply, her eye was clear, her brow untroubled, and there was no shame in her glance or hesitancy in her gesture as she drew forth the ring with which she had been wedded, and placed it on the finger upon which her husband had slipped it but a few short weeks before.

"Sweet sir, I crave your pardon in this matter. If I have acted an undutiful part, I refuse not to submit to all due punishment as though I were your own child. But my dear lord must be my first care. I wedded him in secret, for that my father's consent could not be had, and he stood in danger if his stern father should know what he purposed to do. I will answer to mine own father for what I have done. Gladly would I have told you and my sweet aunt, yet I knew it would but trouble you, seeing my father is far away; and if we waited his reply, it would have been too late. For my dear lord was pledged to foreign service, and (I crave pardon if I speak too boldly) it seemed to me that my first duty was to him who had loved me so faithfully and well, and to whom my heart had long been given. I trow I am not the first maid who has thus reasoned, nor shall I be the last; and not all of those who wed in haste live to repent their rashness."

Here Honora stole a little shy glance at her uncle and aunt; for it was a well-known fact that their marriage had been made in something of a runaway sort, albeit the details were not known to many. Mrs. Furnival was of higher birth than her lord, and would have had some opposition to encounter from her kindred had she not elected to take the law into her own hands. So this sly hint could not but provoke a smile, and Mr. Furnival's sudden wrath passed off in his kindly laugh.

"Ah, thou hast fairly caught me there, my maid," he said. "But tell me now, what meanest thou to do? The Queen's wrath is no light matter, as the fate of the poor youth's own mother and aunt hath shown. Verily, there seemeth a curse upon that house, and I marvel that you foolish children should have been so rash as to dare a secret marriage with such examples before your eyes. And so her Majesty hath got wind of it, and it hath moved her to displeasure? And how canst thou do aught to avert her wrath? Thou art but a simple country wench; thou hast not even been to Court, like thy cousin Barbara, whose ready wit might chance to help her out of any hobble she stepped into."

"And it shall help me to an audience of her Majesty," said Honora, a light shining in her eyes which spoke her strength of purpose. "I know what I will do. Doth not my good uncle Gammage journey forth to London but two days hence to see his daughter? And I know well that he will take me with him, and leave me at our good uncle West's house, where there will be a welcome for me,

as he told me himself ere he left. Then will I see our gay Barbara, who hath the Queen's ear, so they say, as no maid of her years ever had before. She will win for me an audience of her Grace, to whom I shall go with the token in mine hand that she herself bestowed upon me as a pledge of her favour. Alianora was there, and heard her say that when I had a boon to ask I had but to send that token, and she would be graciously pleased to hear my request. And when I kneel to her to pardon and release my dear husband, I trow she will not say me nay. If we have sinned, at least I will beg that we suffer together; for sooner would I share a prison with him than dwell in a palace with any other."

So fervently did the maiden speak, and such love and strength seemed to have entered into her, that Mr. Furnival drew his hand across his eyes, and all the anger and irritation died away.

"Go to, child; thou hast a marvellous ready tongue. I did not know our timid lily-maid could plead so eloquently, or face the thought of a Queen's frown so boldly. Who was it told how thou didst shrink and tremble when called before her, in her most gracious mood? And now thou talkest of facing her in her anger without so much as blanching at the thought."

But Honora smiled and answered, clasping her hands together in her earnestness,—

"Ah, sweet sir, I loved not then; so I knew not what courage was. But now I have my husband to think for, and for him I can dare all."

"Well said, young madam; thou art a bold wench," cried the sailor Gammage approvingly. "And I will e'en start for London to-morrow morn an it please thee, and tell that saucy lass of mine to use her tongue to good purpose. I warrant me that amongst the three of us, and by the help of my mails, which we have not had the heart to open yet, we shall find some way of softening the hardest heart of female Majesty that ever yet beat."

CHAPTER XIV.

A LUCKLESS BRIDEGROOM.

"BY whose authority am I thus stayed and thus detained?" asked Beauchamp, as he eyed with suspicion the low-ceiled, narrow-windowed room into which he was led, and addressed himself to a sombre individual who had received him there, and in whose air and habit there was more of the major-domo than the jailer, notwithstanding the fact that he held a ponderous key in his hand, and appeared to have full command of the prisoner.

"By the authority of one whom you will find it best not to resist, young sir," was the quiet answer. "There are those whose commands are best not questioned; and if you value your own safety you will accept without resistance whatever is laid upon you."

"Mean you the Queen?" asked Beauchamp, who had suspected this all along, since the day when he had been forcibly separated from his companion on the road and carried off he knew not whither.

The capture had been cleverly accomplished in a lonely part of the road, when the two young gallants, owing to

the superiority of their horses, had outstripped their followers, and were riding alone through a belt of dark woodland. Lisle had, it is true, drawn his sword and prepared to do battle to the utmost to save his friend; but Beauchamp would not suffer him to risk his own liberty and favour in resisting the Queen's authority (for in her name was the arrest made), and yielded himself to the guard without active opposition, in hopes that he would be carried straight to some person before whom he could plead his cause, and prove that he had done nothing worthy of such detention. He could imagine no cause for it, unless it were that of his secret marriage; and he knew not how knowledge of it could have been arrived at, seeing it was known to so few persons, and those all absolutely trustworthy.

True, there was just the possibility that the thing had eked out through the suspicions of servants, who have a talent for finding out all the concerns of their masters. But even if it were known, why should the Queen be angered? She had shown no concern in his affairs all these years, and when he had once approached her to ask her favour, she had received his gift, and had even called him cousin, and had smiled upon him. Capricious she undoubtedly was, and yet it was hard to see her purpose in such an act of tyranny. The old danger connected with the succession had long since passed into oblivion. The King of Scots, the Lady Arabella Stuart, and even Lord Huntingdon were now all admitted to stand before his father: and his own legitimacy,

though perfectly well known, was not at this time legally established.

Yet when he put his question to this sombre person he received a sign of assent; though when he eagerly asked that he might be called to answer for his offence before some kind of tribunal, he was told that it was not for prisoners to choose their judges, and that he must be content to remain where he was at her Majesty's pleasure, and be thankful he was no worse lodged.

Beauchamp had no notion whither he had been brought, as they had travelled mostly by night, and that over unfrequented roads which led through thick woods and wild heaths. The last part of the journey had been made in a closed coach, so that he had been able to see nothing; and the shades of night had fallen ere he had been led into this gloomy prison-house.

He looked about him with curious eyes, wondering where he was, and knowing nothing save that it was not the Tower, where his luckless mother had been confined; for there had been none of the roar of the great city about him as he had journeyed thither. He had been made to alight in a square court-yard—so much he knew from the sound made by the coach wheels as they had rattled over the stones—and he had then been hurried up some dark stairs, apparently to the very top of the house; and now he stood in the first of a small suite of low and bare apartments, whose grated windows and heavy oaken doors seemed to show that they had been used before for a like purpose, or else fitted up as a prison for himself.

"What place is this?" he asked of the saturnine man, who stood before him eying him with lowering glances.

"It boots not where it be, so as it be safe and fast," was the not too encouraging reply; and the man appeared as if about to go.

"Nay, I have at least the right to demand the name of the place where I am confined," cried Beauchamp with some heat, "and the offence with which I am charged. I am a peaceable and unoffending subject of her Majesty, and if I have done aught amiss I will answer to her officers for it; but to shut me up here in ignorance of mine offence, tends to no good end either to her or me. Wherefore, I pray you, let me know whereof I am accused, and I will prepare my defence against mine adversaries."

"I am not here to bandy words with you, young sir, but to be answerable for your safe keeping. So I will e'en give you good even, and trust you will sleep well after your journey. You will find supper laid in yon inner chamber, and such change of garment as you may require in the bedchamber beyond. You may be thankful that you are so well cared for. It might have gone differently with you, as it has with other prisoners of your house before now."

And with these sinister words the gloomy-looking servitor retired, not locking the room door after him, but turning his key with grating sound in the outer door of a gallery upon which these three chambers all opened. Beauchamp, following him out as soon as he had heard the significant sound, found that though he had liberty to

wander at will from room to room, yet he could not escape from his quarters on account of the heavy iron-clamped door at the end of the gallery, which was double locked, and probably bolted too, on the outside. As he stood and looked at this door, he fancied that there was something not altogether unfamiliar in its aspect, and yet he could by no means recollect where he had seen it, and certainly he had no recollection of this gallery and its sparsely-furnished rooms.

"Some chance similitude," he muttered at length. "It cannot be aught but a fantasy of my brain."

And then he returned to the antechamber and looked closely about him, but could see nothing which gave him any ray of hope in the matter of escape. There were two windows in the room, but both were guarded by iron bars, as were likewise those in the other two apartments, into which he penetrated by means of the doors of communication. All the rooms were lighted by lamps, and there was a cold collation spread upon the table of the largest chamber; but there were no books, and nothing to while away the weary hours of captivity, and the young man, who had been used to the freedom of an open-air life in the country, felt as if he should soon pine away were he left long in this narrow cage, without news from his wife, or hope of his own release.

He still trusted that this arrest might be due to some error, or at least that he might be permitted to plead his cause before some tribunal, and learn what he had done amiss and what was the penalty to be exacted from him;

yet all the while he was haunted by a horror of some long, indeterminate captivity, such as had been inflicted upon his mother after her marriage, and the phrase, "detention at her Majesty's pleasure," could not but sound ominously in the ears of one who had seen such imprisonment end only too often with the death of the captive. The terrible helplessness of the individual in those days can hardly be realized now. But Beauchamp well knew that if the Queen, having heard of his private marriage, and being angered thereat, had given orders for his arrest and detention, even though her anger might be but a passing spark of wrath, he might well be left for years languishing in some sort of informal captivity, not accused of any crime, not brought before judge or magistrate to answer for the same, but just shut up "at the Queen's pleasure," and likely enough so far forgot, that unless powerful influence could be brought to bear upon her she would never think of reversing the decree. It was a prospect sufficiently appalling, and Beauchamp paced his room that night like a caged panther, revolving many a scheme in his head, yet confronted at every turn by the consciousness of his own perfect helplessness. He was shut up in some place he knew not where. Communication with the outside world was denied him. Plan as he would, he could see no way of forcing his keeper to convey tidings of his imprisonment to his friends; and even if this were accomplished, what could they do if the Queen's anger were aroused against him? His brain seemed on fire. He could neither eat nor sleep, and only when the early dawn

began to steal into the eastern sky did nature so far assert herself as to cause him to take a little rest upon his bed, where he fell into a sort of stupor, crowded with evil visions.

When he awoke the sun was high, and his restless agitation had been replaced by a species of listless depression—the natural reaction from the fatigues he had undergone. He had been travelling rapidly and had eaten little, and for almost twenty-four hours he had not tasted food. He needed, too, the refreshment of a change of dress and a bath, for which he found all needful appliances in the bedchamber; and after he had removed all traces of hurried travel from his person and had changed his clothes, he felt somewhat restored, although far from regaining his customary elasticity of mind.

Some one, he found, had been into the adjoining room whilst he slept, and had spread the table anew with not unpalatable viands. He began to eat languidly at first, but afterwards with greater appetite; and when restored by food, felt that he could review his condition more calmly, and even take some small portion of comfort in the thought that his wife was outside his prison-house, and that she would leave no stone unturned to effect his liberation, although there came to him a dreadful misgiving lest she too perchance might fall under the royal displeasure and be condemned to a like fate.

Distracted by the bare thought of such a thing, Beauchamp had much ado to preserve his calmness, and felt as an imprisoned eagle might do who helplessly beats his

wings against the bars of some cage into which he has been trapped. But there was a great surprise in store for the youth, and one for which he was not in the least prepared, and which boded him, he feared, no good, although he could not be assured how it might tend, and it added a new complication to his maze of perplexity.

He was standing at his window, and looking down from thence into a court-yard below, wondering what it was that suggested the idea of his having seen that place before, when he heard the grating of the key in the lock outside; and turning quickly round, expecting to see the sombre servant who had attended him the night before, came face to face with his own father.

Beauchamp was so astonished that he fell back a pace, and attempted no manner of greeting. Lord Hertford eyed him coldly and sternly, and with nothing paternal or encouraging in his countenance. He was a handsome man of some five-and-forty summers, tall and stalwart and proud of aspect, his dark eyes gleaming beneath coal-black brows, and his whole aspect one that gave an impression of an implacable temperament and inflexible resolution. There had never been much of affinity betwixt father and son, and it was very plain now that the Earl was in a state of high displeasure.

"How now, wretched boy!" he said, without a word that partook of the nature of greeting; "what miserable coil hast thou gone and made of thy prospects in life? Have we not had misery enough in thine house in this matter of secret wedlock, but that thou must e'en go and mix thy-

self up in some new piece of folly? Was it a small thing to have been born in the Tower, that thou must needs do all in thy power to die there? And did I not tell thee years agone that when thou hadst the mind to wed I had a bride ready for thee, to whom no manner of exception could be taken? Why hast thou dared to act thus?"

"I crave your pardon, sir, but I am of age to choose for myself in this matter," answered Beauchamp steadily, "and I wot not how my choice can give offence to you or to her Majesty. The daughter of a noble knight and a trusted servant of her own can be despised by none, nor is her rank yet so exalted that there can be any sort of peril in our being thus united. I know not how the report reached her Majesty's ears; but I see naught in what I have done to cause her ire to be kindled against me."

The Earl sneered, and possibly a keen observer would have noted that a look of contemptuous amusement crossed his face as Beauchamp spoke his words with regard to the Queen; but his aspect was still as stern and unyielding as before, and he made a short, sharp reply.

"Her Majesty is not answerable to thee for her actions, thou malapert boy, and thou wilt find it no jesting matter thus to have incurred her displeasure. Now heed me carefully, and all may yet be well with thee; but an thou wilt not give dutiful submission to thy father, perchance she will see fit to remove thee to a straighter prison, and then indeed thou mayest whistle for thy liberty."

"Hath her Majesty given charge that I be lodged in

thine own house? Then, marry, that is why there seemed something familiar to me in its aspect, albeit I never was in these same rooms before. Speak on, sir; I give you good heed. I would pleasure you if so I might with honour; but in the matter of my marriage—"

"Ay, there it be; it is of thy marriage I come to speak to thee. It scarce boots to be called a marriage, and such contracts can be easily cancelled by a divorce. Let that but be done, and thou mayest go free as air; but an thou remainest stubborn, I cannot answer for the end of this business."

Beauchamp was so astonished that for a moment he said nothing; and his father, fancying himself gaining an easy victory, spoke more fully of his iniquitous wish of divorcing the wedded pair, in order that his son might mate himself with a bride of his own choice. But as soon as Beauchamp could command himself sufficiently to answer, he bade his father cease from such words, as he would be torn in pieces ere he would dishonour his loving wife, and his own vow taken in God's name, by any thought of such wickedness.

The Earl, not used to being thwarted, lifted his voice and urged his point with threats and menaces, and high words passed between the men, neither of whom would yield an inch. The battle raged loud and fierce. But Beauchamp's courage rose with his need, and he plainly showed his sire that he was neither to be coerced nor intimidated; and at last Lord Hertford, cursing him for his obstinacy and folly, turned on his heel and quitted the

gallery, telling him that he would sing a different tune when he had tasted more of the sweets of captivity.

And in sooth this captivity was henceforward made sufficiently rigorous to the youth, who was permitted no exercise save what he could take in the gallery of his prison, and who suffered much from the heat of the summer sun, which shone mercilessly down upon the leaden roofs under which his rooms lay, making them hot as an oven, so that there were times when he felt unable so much as to breathe.

And indeed his health began so greatly to suffer in consequence of this harsh treatment that his father was obliged to relax some of its severity; and one day, to his immense relief, the captive was taken out into a small walled-in garden, where he was left alone to take such exercise as he pleased, and enjoy the sense of being in the pure air of heaven once again. The walls were high and guarded by iron spikes, and he had no doubt that they were watched more or less from without, so that the idea of attempted escape did not seriously suggest itself. But it was much to have even this amount of liberty. And he needed some small solace to cheer him; for his close captivity, and the apparent hopelessness of holding any kind of communication with the outside world, was preying heavily upon him, whilst his longing for news of his wife had become almost stronger than he could bear. And yet if help did not come from without, it seemed as if he might pine away for years shut up in hopeless captivity.

The only person he ever saw during his daily hour spent

in this garden was a little boy—a gardener's son, as he learned—who, when spoken to by the prisoner, confessed that he hid himself in the garden for the express purpose of seeing the young gentleman of whom all the household was talking. Beauchamp had a gentle and winning way with him, and it was such pleasure to hear even the prattle of a child, that he encouraged the little fellow to sit beside him and talk; and it gradually came out that the boy was grandson to an old servant who had been warmly attached to him (Beauchamp) when he was a child, and had, moreover, known his mother. It also appeared that the old woman had bidden the child do anything he could to pleasure the poor young gentleman; and Beauchamp asked him if he thought his grandame would despatch a letter for him to its destination if she were to receive it through his hands.

The child was old enough and shrewd enough to be trusted with a secret, as was shown by his daily visits to the garden, which were plainly unsuspected by the authorities; and he brought word back that the letter should be carefully kept and forwarded by a safe hand, and the wherewithal to write was furnished through the same means,—for Beauchamp was denied any writing appliances, and had no possible way of communicating with the outside world.

But he had long been conning over in his mind a letter to the secretary, Sir Francis Walsingham, and it was to him he determined to appeal, knowing his uprightness of character and his great influence with the Queen.

Philip Sidney had married Walsingham's daughter; and not long since, when Sidney was living in retirement (after his quarrel with the young Earl of Oxford in the tennis-court, which had given umbrage to the Queen), writing his "Arcadia," Beauchamp and Robert Sidney had been their guests for a time, and had met there Mr. Secretary himself, who had slipped away from Court cares for a few days' leisure and refreshment with his daughter and her husband. Thus the young man had been thrown into pleasant and easy conference with the great statesman, and had learned, in common with all who came in contact with him, great respect for his capacity, and confidence in his uprightness and integrity. He had also discussed with him the advisability of his own appearance at Court, and Walsingham had evidently seen no reason against it, as the Queen's jealousy of his family was now a thing of the past. It seemed incredible that his marriage with Honora Rogers should have drawn down upon him the royal displeasure in so great a measure as that Mr. Secretary's influence should not be sufficient to allay it; and so soon as Beauchamp found himself in possession of the wherewithal to write, he at once addressed himself to the task of composing a letter to the statesman in whom the Queen had such confidence.

The letter was written, and duly confided to the care of the little boy, who in turn delivered it secretly to his grandmother, and word was brought to the anxious captive that it had been fastened safely up in a bale of cloth being despatched to a son in London, who would on receipt of

the same pass it on to the right quarter without troubling himself to ask questions. After that, all the youth could do was to possess his soul in patience, till he could see the result of his venture.

One week and then two passed by, and still there was no sign from without, and Beauchamp began to fear that his missive had miscarried, or that Walsingham had not cared to interfere on his behalf or intercede for him with the angry Queen. He lived in the same dreary fashion, seeing nobody but the sombre man-servant who attended upon him, unless his father paid him a visit, in which the same hot words were invariably bandied, each interview leaving behind it a sense of increased hopelessness in the mind of the prisoner.

The summer was waning now, and the shortening days were in themselves somewhat dreary, whilst the weariness of captivity and the apparent hopelessness of release were weighing like lead on the poor captive's spirits. Even the small solace derived from the chatter of the little boy was soon denied him; for the secret visits of the child to the garden being discovered, they were forthwith stopped, and Beauchamp was left to his original solitude.

On one dull and misty September day, as the afternoon drew towards its dreary close, an unwonted sound struck upon Beauchamp's ear, as he sat with a book before him—one of the few volumes grudgingly permitted him by his harsh father—the sound, as it seemed, of approaching voices, and voices pitched in a somewhat high and loud key. He held his breath to listen, and was the more convinced that

there were persons approaching his prison. In a moment more the sound of the drawing of bolts and the grating of a key in the lock made assurance doubly sure, and Beauchamp, rising to his feet in surprise, was simply thunderstruck to see entering his room a weather-beaten man of nautical aspect, in whom he at once recognized Captain Gammage, the uncle of Honora and father of Barbara. Behind, and plainly in a sullen and discomfited mood, walked Lord Hertford, who did not even look at his son, but stood key in hand, as if he wished himself anywhere else.

Beauchamp was so astonished at this apparition that he could find no words in which to welcome his unexpected guest; but the sailor made up for all deficiencies on his part by seizing his hand in a good English grip, whilst he poured out a torrent of eager disjointed words of greeting, not unmixed with some stronger expressions that need not be repeated here.

"Why, boy, what have they been doing to thee mewed up here? Why, thy face is as white as thy lawn ruff, and thou lookest half-starved to boot! Her Grace will have something to say to thy jailer, I warrant me" (with a meaning look at Hertford, under which he winced somewhat). "They who take her name in vain, forsooth, will have to answer for it to her in a fashion they may not find so delightsome."

"Come you from her Majesty?" asked Beauchamp eagerly. "Hath her Grace thought good to pardon me?"

"Pardon thee! Beshrew me if she hath anything to

pardon. What! didst thou think the brewst was of her brewing? Ay, so I learnt, and so did her Grace, and a mighty fine tempest there arose, I can tell thee. By cock and pie, thou shouldest have seen her face when thy sweet wife knelt at her feet imploring her mercy and pardon! It might have melted a heart of stone, for the maid had had perforce to wait many long weeks ere she could obtain an audience. Her Majesty was travelling hither and thither when first we reached London on this business, and when she returned she had a brief illness or colic—I know not what—and it was deemed an untimely moment to crave any boon. And whilst we thus waited for the distemper to pass, thy wife grew more lily-like day by day, till when she did gain audience of her Grace, to which I too was admitted, being my maid's father and a liege servant of her Grace, why, it was pitiful to see how her tears choked her, till the Queen was fain to dry them herself; for she was in one of her tenderest moods, and the lady had come with a token in her hand that was like to have won her favour at any time."

Beauchamp's eyes were shining with strange emotion.

"And my Honora did that for me? She braved the Queen's wrath, and craved audience to plead for me?"

"Ay, marry she did, like the brave, true-hearted wench she is; and a heart of stone would have melted to hear her sweet pleading."

"And she won for me the Queen's pardon?"

"Pardon, forsooth! Why, there is no need of pardon where there is no cause of offence. The Queen listened in

amaze to hear what had befallen thee, and then—saving her royal presence—she swore as good a round oath as ever I have heard at sea, and asked wherefore her name had been thus vilely used in the matter."

"Mean you that this imprisonment hath been no work of hers?"

"Ay, verily I do; and let those look to themselves who have dared to make use of her name to cover their vile projects"—and with that Gammage shot a glance at Lord Hertford which caused the other to wince and look disturbed. "Well, to make a long story short, her Majesty was put in a fine coil by it all, and though they do say she hath been in times past marvellously ready to clap folks into prison with or without trial, she was in a mighty taking at hearing that any subject of hers had dared to follow her example. And therewith she vowed she would see thee righted, calling heaven to be her witness if she did not show her subjects that she was Queen, and that those who took upon them to infringe their liberties should feel the weight of her displeasure. But when she came to question as to your place of imprisonment, no one could tell her where it was, nor who had been the cause of it, until one of the maids of honour, Lady Mary Howard, came forward and said she was sure her sister Lady Frances, who had wed Lord Hertford, and was mightily jealous of his son, was at the bottom of it, and had all but admitted as much to her by letter. And then as all the palace was in a ferment anent the matter, it comes to Mr. Secretary's ears, and forthwith he hastens to the Queen

with a letter in his hand which came from thee, lad, imploring his good offices with her Grace."

"Ay, I feared that letter had miscarried."

"Nay, it was in his hands safe enow, and the Queen read it, and thereat fell into another rage, but not with thee, young sir, only with those who would dare to use her name as a cloak for their maliciousness. And forthwith she decreed that my Lord Hertford should be called upon to answer for his offence, and there was high talk of the Tower and I know not what beside. But your sweet lady, young sir, showed herself once more courageous and merciful, and kneeling before the Queen implored that there should be no talk of punishment, only that her husband might be restored to her and to liberty. And as Mr. Secretary was beside her Majesty, whispering that it were better to pass over such offences in silence in these troublous days, and her wrath had expended itself in some honest hard swearing, she was fain to be persuaded; but decreed that she would have the pair of you gentlemen brought to Court and reconciled in her very presence.—And I warn you, my Lord Hertford, that she will demand of you a sufficient and ample maintenance for your son, to keep him and his wife in such state as their rank entitles them to; and the better grace you show before her Majesty, the better it will prove for you in this business."

"Then are we to go to Court? Shall I see my wife there?" asked Beauchamp, so bewildered by this sudden turn of fortune's wheel as hardly to be master of his faculties.

"Ay, verily, you are, and that without a moment's needless delay. I have advised the Earl your father to lose no time, lest the Queen's present gracious mood may change to something worse for him. I myself begged to have the bearing of the news, and have come with all speed; and I counsel that we are in the saddle by sunrise to-morrow, so that we arrive at Greenwich ere set of sun. We can e'en accomplish the journey by hard riding, as I have done this day; and I warrant me, young sir, that for all you look so pined and wan, the thought of meeting your lady at the other end will give you the needful courage and strength. I had much ado to hinder the pretty bird from coming with me, but I meant to travel more rapidly than would have suited her strength."

"Heaven bless you for your speed!" cried Beauchamp, who now seized the bluff but kindly-hearted sailor by the hand and shook it heartily. "You will not find me a laggard on the way. I would I could borrow the wings of the eagle and dart through the air."

Lord Hertford, who had stood by all this time in silence, as if both ashamed and afraid, now made a step forward, and said, with an attempt at ease which was nevertheless somewhat limping and awkward,—

"Well, well, my son, I tried to act for the best. You might have had a rich wife, who would have forwarded your interests in life, had you but listened to me; but if you must needs go your own way, and get her Majesty at your back, why, I have no more to say. I crave your pardon if I have been harsh in my treatment; yet I but

did as seemed best. I would have made thee a great and prosperous man."

"And I would fain remain in the safety of obscurity. Yet I thank you, my lord; and as for prosperity, I reckon the faithful love of the wife I have wed as above all else that the world can hold. Let us speak no more of this, but do the Queen's pleasure with all good-will; and in all other matters you shall not find me lacking in such dutiful submission as it may be my part to render."

And so father and son shook hands—Beauchamp too happy in his present release to brood over the unworthy stratagem which had been practised upon him, and the Earl only too glad to find his son so little rancorous towards him, since he had gathered from their late stormy interviews that he had plenty of spirit and force of character.

They all quitted the gloomy rooms where the young man had been so long confined, and supped together in the hall below, Lady Frances alone preserving a dogged and injured air, as if she took in evil part what had just passed. Indeed she was so uncontrolled in her language that the Earl was forced to chide her openly, and Beauchamp wondered the less, in noting the temper of the lady, that his father had been led by her in this matter to the violent course he had taken.

There was little sleep for him that night, but he was up with the lark, drinking in, with the delight that none but a released prisoner can feel, the clear, fresh morning air, which none could now forbid him. The joyous sense of exhilara-

tion induced by feeling his horse once more beneath him was almost intoxicating, and although somewhat weakened in health by his long captivity, he was certainly no laggard on the road. As the dusk began to fall, and the outlines of the distant palace hove in sight, his was the eye that first descried a small group of equestrians riding as if to meet them, and the next moment he had exclaimed in accents of rapture,—

"It is she—it is Honora—it is my wife!"

And so in truth it was—Honora and Barbara, with a few gentlemen in attendance, coming out to meet the travellers on their homeward way. It was so like a dream that Beauchamp could hardly believe his own senses, till Honora spoke his name, and then indeed he knew that it was she. The others fell back a little to leave them alone together, and yet they seemed to have little to say. He laid his hand upon hers as they rode on side by side, and she looked into his eyes in measureless contentment. Both were somewhat worn and changed by these weeks of anxiety, but they hardly noted that in the pure happiness of being together once again.

"My sweet, brave, tender wife, I owe this to thee," he said as they rode at length beneath the gateway; and she looked up in his face, and said,—

"Didst thou think that I should rest night or day until I had thee free again? Didst thou not know I was working for thee?"

"I feared thou too mightest be suffering for an act into which I had persuaded thee."

"The sweetest act of all my life," said the young wife with a look which went to his heart. "How I have rejoiced that I had won the right to plead for thee and work for thee! Had this happened, as it might have done, to keep us apart, I should have been helpless; and how could I have borne it?"

It was strange indeed to Beauchamp to be lodged in the palace as a guest, in a sense, of the Queen; and stranger still was it to stand in due course amid a gay assemblage, to watch her dine in public, as was done in those days. The Queen's eye soon singled him out, and she bade him approach, and gave him her hand to kiss; and after she had retired, he was summoned to her private room, whither his father had been called before him, and where Honora, with Barbara and other ladies of the bedchamber, were in attendance, watching with eyes full of amusement their royal mistress righting the wrongs of a married couple. Generally she was somewhat harsh towards those who had entered the matrimonial state; but inasmuch as she had thrown herself with good-natured impetuosity into the young lovers' quarrel, she was going to carry the affair through handsomely, and see them well out of their troubles. It was plain that the Earl had received a sound rating from his sovereign for having dared to use her name in the capture and detention of his son, for the poor man had lost all his pride of bearing, and seemed eager to do anything in his power to appease the royal displeasure.

Beauchamp prostrated himself with all a courtier's grace at the feet of his royal lady, and Honora, at a sign from

Barbara, knelt at his side; and when permitted to speak, they poured out their thanks in terms of such heartfelt gratitude that Elizabeth's brow relaxed and her really sweet smile lighted up her face. She gave Beauchamp her hand to kiss, and caressed Honora's dark head with a playful and kindly touch, and then, lifting her glance to the Earl, she asked him what he proposed to do in the matter of an establishment for his fair son and daughter, now that their situation demanded a suitable provision.

The Earl meekly replied that he was ready to do anything that should be desired of him. His son might have a certain property which he named as being one in his own possession already, or he would purchase a house for him elsewhere, and make a suitable allowance for the needs of his household.

"Marry, well spoken; that is what a father needs must do when his son weds so fair and well-born a lady. And it hath been told me that a certain small but commodious Manor in our county of Southampton is just such as would satisfy these fond young folks. My Lord Willoughby purchased it for the use of his wife, who hath lately passed away; wherefore it hath been told to me that it is to be sold once again if a purchaser can be found. Some good fairy hath whispered to me that such a place as that will well suit this fair lady, and therefore I recommend you not to be slack in the matter. My Lord Willoughby is but now returned from abroad, and meditates another journey to the Provinces, wherefore he will be the more glad to dispose of this manor; and it will do well for your son to

retire there to enjoy his happiness and his restored liberty in the smiles of his wife."

Beauchamp and Honora gave to each other a look of mutual congratulation, and after many earnest thanks to the Queen retired from her presence. It was evident that with all her love of justice and desire to see them righted, she did not desire their attendance at the Court, any more than they themselves wished to remain there. The retirement to this peaceful home was all and more than they could desire for themselves; and thus closed the strange and romantic episode of Lord Beauchamp's secret marriage, which might have had a far different and more tragic termination.

CHAPTER XV.

LORD WILLOUGHBY.

"AH!" said Lord Willoughby, drawing a long breath, "this at last means war."

"You think as much?" cried Ivo, whose face was deeply flushed, and whose eager eyes and impetuous bearing denoted no small excitement of mind. "Then Heaven grant that I too may go and slay a score or so of dastardly Spaniards ere I handle ploughshare again!—Father, mother, you will not say me nay in this? You will let me go? It might be that I should thus gain news of Humphrey—at least his fate shall be avenged."

"Mother, mother, and you, sweet father, you will not hold *me* back if it comes to blows," cried Gilbert, who was every whit as much moved as his brother; and indeed it seemed as if some news had reached the country which had set every heart in a tumult and every fibre quivering, for Mr. Furnival raised his hand, and his answer was spoken in a tone of absolute solemnity.

"God forbid that I should hold back any of my name from doing his duty to his country, when the call comes for its sons to go forth against a dastardly and cruel foe.

Let her Majesty but declare war, and I will not withhold from her service any son of mine."

And even the mother, whose silver hairs told a tale of silent and ceaseless sorrow, added her word to this, and said,—

"When the call of duty comes, I trust our lads will ever be in the foremost rank, fighting for the honour of their country and the safety of their homes."

"Amen," said a deep voice from the chimney-corner, and this word was spoken by none other than the sea-rover Gammage, who was seated in his old place, with his daughter at his feet. He looked more battered and weather-beaten than ever, and had plainly but lately recovered from a disabling wound; but there was a steady fire burning in his eyes which spoke of his unquenchable spirit. To all that household, and indeed to many another, he was the hero of the day, and it was the intelligence which he had brought home in his good ship the *Primrose* which had set the whole country in a blaze. The news was flying from mouth to mouth and hand to hand, and where it was heard it roused in English breasts just such a burning and vehement indignation as had been expressed in the words and looks of the Furnival brothers. That long-smouldering enmity to Spain, which had been working like leaven slowly and imperceptibly for some time past, now threatened to burst into a flame and carry all before it. A few words will suffice to explain and fully justify this feeling of indignation and hostility.

For many years there had been a sort of petty and un-

authorized warfare going on between the ships of England and the ships of Spain; and certainly, on the whole, the English had been the aggressors, falling upon Spanish treasure-ships and plundering them whenever they had the chance; whilst from time to time the Inquisition would swoop down upon one of the English vessels in Spanish harbours and carry off her crew to their dungeons. Therefore, although trade was still carried on between the two countries, and Philip had not wound himself up to the point of proclaiming war, there was much strained feeling between the sailors of each country, and a certain sense of peril in connection with trading in foreign waters.

But latterly a desolating famine had ravaged the countries of Galicia and Andalusia, and the English corn-ships, bringing grain for the starving people, had come across with special promises that they should be free from every sort of molestation, if they would but continue to supply the sorely-needed food to these districts. So the corn-ships came in great numbers, relying upon this promise, and upon the fact that there was no war between the two countries. But Philip was secretly commencing his preparations for his "Invincible Armada," and he was much irritated at the English aid sent to the Netherlands, and at the overtures made to Elizabeth by the States. Suddenly, therefore, and without the smallest warrant, he issued orders that every English vessel in Spanish ports should be seized, their crews sent to the galleys and prisons, and their guns and ammunition transferred to his own arsenals, ready to supply the Armada when the ships were built. And this

dastardly order had been carried out to the letter. The ships lying in port, whose coming had been on an errand of mercy, taken by surprise, and totally unprepared, fell for the most part an easy prey; thousands of our English seamen were in the hands and at the mercy of the Spaniards; and our merchants had been plundered of their goods. Only a few ships had succeeded in making good their escape, and amongst these was the *Primrose*, a ship belonging to the merchant West and commanded by brave Captain Gammage.

He had brought to England not only the news of this detestable act of treachery, but a prisoner of no less importance than the Corregidor of Biscay. The *Primrose* had been lying in the roads of Bilboa with her crew—not a large one—on board, when the Corregidor came on board, as if on a friendly visit to the captain. He took stock of all he saw, and thinking the vessel defenceless, returned to shore, and came back accompanied by two or three boat-loads of soldiers. He then mounted once more to the deck, and seizing Gammage by the arm told him he was a prisoner. But at that the bold old seaman shook himself free, and shouted out to his men to arm and defend themselves. Up from below they came rushing, armed with axes, pistols, cutlasses—anything upon which they could first lay hands. With a yell of fury they flung themselves upon the Spaniards, their captain leading them on. Overboard they pitched the aggressors, upon the heads of their companions below, who had not had time to effect a landing on the ship. One boat was capsized; and the sailors hurled stones and other missiles at the struggling forms in the

water, throwing every Spaniard on board over into the sea, not excepting the Corregidor himself, till their decks were cleared. But the latter held on tight to a cable, and was presently hauled on board again as a prisoner; and the *Primrose*, spreading her sails to a favouring wind, was soon far on her way towards home, several of her crew having been killed and others wounded, amongst whom was her captain. But she had escaped the treachery of Philip, and was the first ship to reach English ports with the news of this last act of his Most Catholic Majesty.

The roar of execration which ran through the city reached even to the Queen's ears, and the cautious Elizabeth was put into one of the royal rages which she had inherited from her father. Prudent and vacillating she might be by nature, but she could act with promptitude on occasion, and letters of reprisal were instantly issued. The merchants had leave to avenge themselves and repair their losses by any means in their power, and the enraged Queen was ready at that moment to declare war without delay, but that her ministers advised deliberation, and recommended the policy of striking at the power of Spain through the rebellious Provinces.

As for Gammage, he had partially recovered of his wound during the homeward voyage, but was still unfit to go to sea again without some measure of repose at home. He had been publicly thanked by the merchants of London for his spirited conduct, and had had an interview with the Queen herself, in which the only favour he had begged was the liberty to carry off "his maid" with him to tend him

till he should be a hale man again, when he would go and fight with the best of them. And thus it was that by slow stages the pair had reached Wyndgate Manor, bringing the news with them which had set the whole household on fire, as it had done every place through which they had passed.

Several changes had taken place at the Manor and in its neighbourhood since the sailor had seen it last, almost a year before, when he had started off with Honora for London to plead for the liberty of her husband. Now, young Lord and Lady Beauchamp were happily established at the Croft, which had again changed hands, Lord Willoughby being very ready to sell it after his wife's death. A happier pair than the young couple it would be hard to find, and it seemed as if all the troubles of his early life were to be atoned for in this happy and peaceful home.

Honora's father had come home soon after his daughter and her husband had been established at the Croft, and although he had been greatly surprised at the marriage, he had not had the heart to fall foul of either of them for the parts they had played in the matter. Indeed, after a pleasant six weeks passed beneath their roof, he spoke of letting or selling his own house, and making a home with "his children," at such time as his duties allowed him to retire into private life; so the last weight upon Honora's mind had been removed, and she was the sweetest and brightest of young wives. Barbara told her merrily she must never let the Queen see her, or she would be almost disposed to lament her own resolve to remain in the maiden state.

It had been near upon Christmas before Lord Willoughby

had returned to his family. He had had due notice of his wife's death, and the arrangements which had been made by the Furnivals for the comfort and well-being of his children. Letters expressing the warmest gratitude had answered theirs, and he had intended hastening home to see them, when the death of the Prince of Orange the previous summer had filled all Europe with consternation (or with joy, according to religion and policy), and he had departed forthwith to the Provinces to confer with Prince Maurice and other statesmen, and bring back word to our ministers at home of their intended policy.

Thus it had been long before he had been free to rejoin his family; nor had he felt master of his time for some while after that. And although he had spoken many times of moving them from their present home, fearing they must be proving a tax upon their kind hosts, the change had never been made; for the health of the youngest was so frail that Mrs. Furnival's motherly care seemed absolutely necessary to preserve its little life, and all the six clung so fondly to her and to Ursula that it seemed almost cruelty to think of moving them. Hospitality in those days was carried out on a liberal scale, and Mr. Furnival would hear nothing about trouble or cost. The presence of children in the old house, he said, had done more for his wife, in those sad days after news had reached them of Humphrey's fate, than anything else could have done. It would be like bereaving her of more children to take them away now; and to what purpose would it be, when all were agreed as to their present well-being?

Willoughby had no answer ready; indeed he admitted that he only feared he wished too much to secure a continuance of the happiness and health his children enjoyed beneath the roof of the old Manor. So although the discussion was raised again from time to time, the same conclusion was always arrived at—namely, to leave things as they were; and it began to be plain how matters would finally adjust themselves, although not even to themselves did Mr. and Mrs. Furnival speak of their suspicions.

As for Alianora, she was at present living with her father at their own castle not many miles away. The Earl had been attacked by the gout, and being somewhat disappointed with Court life, which had not gained for him any of those coveted distinctions which had been bestowed upon other men, he had resolved to retire to his own house for a time, and await there the return of his son from the Provinces, where he yet remained, having apparently lost all wish for any life but that of a soldier.

And Alianora was more content and happy than she had been since the terrible news of Humphrey's capture by the Spaniards. She had an object in life in ministering to the needs of her suffering father, and although she had a good deal to endure from his capricious temper and variable moods, she felt that she was doing her duty, and that he was gradually learning to understand her better, and to be less harsh in his strictures upon her conduct. He still spoke peevishly from time to time about her foolish conduct at court, offending the Queen without gaining for herself a husband; and he certainly still looked forward to

her eventual marriage with some man of title or renown; but when she gently asked him why he was in such haste to be rid of her, and how he would like to be without her, he generally answered by a half-reluctant admission that for the present he was content to leave matters as they were. He was growing to depend a good deal upon Mr. Furnival, who would come in often to sit an hour with him, to beguile the tedium of his captivity; and the worthy gentleman always left him calmer and more reasonable than he found him. He also began to enjoy the visits which Ursula, Bess, Mrs. Furnival, or Honora Beauchamp paid to his daughter, and was altogether a changed character. Alianora was losing her first fear and constraint, and very gradually acquiring an influence over him which she certainly had never expected to do in the first instance.

But to return to the story and the excitement of the present moment, when all the country—all the maritime counties at least—had been put into a fever for war, and public opinion throughout the land was gradually tending that way.

And yet in many minds—sober and far-seeing minds—there were doubts which were put into words by Mr. Furnival himself, as he and his family sat discussing the situation together.

"Can it be possible that a small nation like ourselves, without at present an ally in the world, can wage anything but disastrous warfare with the King of Spain, who hath half the world in his territory, with all the wealth of

the Indies at his command, and Rome as his ally? Here are we, our nation divided into hostile camps, half Protestant, half Catholic, beset on one side by troubles in Ireland, and on another by dangers from Scotland, and from the captive Queen, who methinks will always remain a thorn in our side. It seemeth strange that we have no friend in Europe in whom to trust for aid, save those poor Provinces, already devastated by war. And yet I see not whither we should turn for help in our hour of need, nor know I how we can hope to stand single-handed against the vast power of Philip of Spain.—How say you, good brother Gammage?"

"How say I? Why, marry, that the sooner we have a bout with that cunning spider, weaving his webs in his closet there in his palace, and plotting how he can get our Queen into his clutches, that he may rack and burn her subjects at his leisure, the better it will be for us all. Call him a great monarch, forsooth? Why, he is naught but a Colossus stuffed with clouts. Give me a good fleet of ten sail, with Drake and Hawkins and Frobisher to command them, and marry if I wager not that these would burn every Spanish ship in their own harbours ere they could put to sea at all."

Mr. Furnival smiled, thinking this confidence somewhat overdone, little knowing how soon Captain Gammage's words would be at least partially verified. Lord Willoughby, who was listening and pondering, made a slight sign of assent, and said,—

"I trow you are right in one thing, Captain Gammage—

that the sooner we make up our minds to conclude this hollow peace the better it will be for us. His Most Catholic Majesty is meditating preparations on a gigantic scale, so rumour whispers at least; yet at the rate he moves, some years must elapse ere he can be ready. Our part, therefore, is to be up and at him whilst as yet his navy is but on paper and his army engaged in the Provinces. But I fear her Majesty will not resolve on any open act of hostility. It is scarce easier to her to make up her mind than it is to the King of Spain himself. At this moment her wrath hath been mightily stirred; but it will die down again, I fear me, and she will profess that the reprisals made by our merchants and seamen are made without her sanction, albeit she will secretly rejoice that they were made."

"Ay, ay, that is her fashion—God bless her," said the sailor in a tone of fond pride. "And glad enough are we to take the blame, so as her foes feel our good steel and we bring home their gold. But my blood boils in my veins each time I think of our poor comrades, rotting by hundreds and thousands in their foul prisons, or at their mercy chained to the galley bench. I would hurl defiance at them and their master, and send out such a fleet to the rescue as should not leave a Spanish sail upon the wide seas.'

The young men almost cheered as these words passed the sailor's lips, and Barbara, her black eyes flashing, longed that she might be a man, to lead on some picked crew of desperate gallants, to sweep the seas and carry all before them; but she shook her raven head as

the Queen's probable conduct in the matter was discussed, and fully corroborated what Lord Willoughby had said as to her Majesty's most likely course of conduct.

"Sir John Crofts hath ever her ear," she said; "and there are others, too, who are friends to Spain, and they in private work upon her, and thus all the good advice given her by my Lord Treasurer and Mr. Secretary is undone. Sir John is the worst: but her Grace believeth mightily in him; and sooth to tell, he hath so smooth a tongue and such a ready wit that he might persuade almost any man or woman to believe him whilst he speaks."

"Ay, verily, so it hath been told me," said Willoughby gravely and thoughtfully. "But for his evil counsel I well believe her Majesty would have acted more liberally and boldly by the Provinces, and have ceased these vacillations which are all but driving them to despair. I marvel that a woman of so acute perceptions and so keen a mind sees not her way before her. To give substantial aid to these patriots is the surest way of stabbing at the power of Spain. Let but these oppressed Provinces shake off the accursed yoke, and the world will see that the tyrant's power is broken, and will no longer tremble before him as invincible."

Thus the nation talked, and thus indeed there was cause to talk. The situation of the country was extremely critical; for if, after all the Queen's half-promises and uncertain aid, she declined to do more for the oppressed Netherlands, they would be forced in self-defence to seek a league with France, ever England's foe; and that once completed, En-

gland would be left without a friend in Europe. Far rather would the struggling Provinces have England for an ally, but they had almost begun to despair of receiving substantial help from that quarter. The Queen was not entirely indifferent to their distress and their peril, nor to the fact that if they once fell under the dominion of Spain, her own turn would next come; yet her constitutional irresolution made any kind of open or irretrievable step difficult to her, until the peril of Antwerp, and the fact that Flanders had fallen, city by city, into the hands of Spain, induced her to arouse herself to the necessity of action, and to receive at Greenwich Palace a deputation from Holland and Zeeland (provinces still heroically standing out for their liberties), in order to settle upon the terms of an alliance.

Little was known in the country of these negotiations whilst they were pending; but the Furnivals were more alive to what was passing in high places from the fact that Lord Willoughby took the keenest interest in everything in which the Provinces were concerned, and as soon as he heard of this deputation to the Queen, he hastened up to London, that he might know how matters stood there.

"I trow we shall see him no more these many days," said Gammage, as he watched him ride away in the bright July sunshine; "his heart is with those oppressed people. He will fly off thither with some band of bold volunteers, or if the Queen sends troops he will go with them, and little will England see of him till that long struggle be over."

"I would I might go with him," cried little Robert, who

was holding Ursula's hand, straining his eyes after the retreating form of his father. "Why should I not be his page, and go with him to the wars? I am big and I am strong. I would fight too, and kill the Spaniards, and drive them into the sea."

"And so would I, in sooth," cried the second boy, a fine sturdy little fellow almost as big as his elder brother. "Father said that there were boys no bigger than us in the court of the good Prince of Orange ere he died, and he would have sent us there to be trained if the Prince had but lived. Why should we not go now with father? We can ride and we can fight; I know we can, for Ivo hath taught us, and Gilbert also.—Mother Ursula, wilt thou not write to father, and bid him take us with him an he goes?"

"Why should I ask for you, children?" she asked, smiling, though her heart felt unaccountably heavy. "Can you not frame your own requests to so kind a father?"

The boys looked for a moment at one another, and then William glanced slyly up into Ursula's face.

"Father would listen better if thou wert to ask him," he said; "he always pays heed to every word thou speakest. When we ask if we may do this or that, he always answers, 'Ask Mistress Ursula; she knoweth best.'"

"And sometimes he saith, 'Ask thy mother,'" added Robert; "but he ever meaneth thee."

Ursula's face suddenly glowed, and she turned hastily away. She had been called "Mother Ursula" so long by the children that the name had become familiar to her;

but she had never heard Lord Willoughby use the term, and she scarce knew if she were glad or sorry that he too had done so.

The days seemed somewhat heavy to her as the summer weeks passed by, and the men were busy with their duties about the land, and her mother and sister ceaselessly employed in still-room and pantry, seeing to the preserving and laying up of stores against the winter, and superintending the salting of the meat which was to last the household during the long months of the year when (in those days) few cattle were killed for food, as there was small means of fattening beasts in the winter months. Ursula had hitherto taken her part in these domestic duties, which formed the ordinary routine of woman's life; but in consideration of her cares for the children she was exempted from many of them, and her spare time was spent for the most part at her spinning-wheel, where she could dream her own dreams as she sat with her distaff and spindle, and wonder what was passing in the great world of state, and what would be the next news that they would receive from the absent traveller. Would it be, as her uncle had surmised, and as her own thoughts boded, that he would go away into that other land and join the struggle into which he had long ago thrown his heart? And if so, would he return to say farewell to his children? or would he but send a message to them, and have thought for little else than the clash of arms and the strife of parties? She did not know. She did not like to ask herself how much it meant to her; but her eyes began to wear a wistful

look, and some of the colour faded slowly from her face as the days passed by and yet he did not come.

She went as often as she could to Alianora, for there was always the chance that a letter from the viscount might have come, telling them of the state of the country in which she began to take such deep interest. The English troops already in the Low Countries were in great distress for clothes, arms, and money from England, and Lord Courtland, in answer to pressing requests from his son, had sent out bountiful supplies for the little company which he commanded; but help was urgently needed on a larger scale, and all Ursula's spare time was spent in the manufacture of coarse garments for the poor soldiers, which she meant to send out upon the first opportunity which presented itself.

Honora and Alianora both caught some of her enthusiasm, and commenced a like work on their side. Honora, who felt just a little guilty at withholding her husband from the cause which he had meant to embrace, and keeping him beside her in England, was glad to make amends by a liberality and zeal in minor matters; and as money was not lacking, her contribution promised to be something considerable.

"I would I could but go out to distribute them myself," said Ursula one day, after a letter from the viscount had been read, telling of the sufferings of the soldiers owing to the lack of needful clothing. "I trust we may have means of conveying them ere the winter cold begin. But one would fain see that they reached the right hands, so

many things miscarry in times of confusion. Methinks I could be well pleased to go thither myself, and work amongst the sick and poor and needy."

"Thou wouldest be a true sister of mercy, I doubt not," answered Honora fondly. "They need such as thee, or I know naught of the matter. If my Lord Willoughby journeys thither, belike he will take these stores and see them well allotted. Methinks he hath a kind heart and a shrewd head. My dear lord foretells a brilliant future for him; and he hath known him well this many years."

"Ay, verily, I well believe it," answered Ursula, who was never better pleased than when hearing Willoughby's praises sung; and then, as the daylight was waning, she said adieu to her companion, and set off across the field-path which led to her home.

She was musing over what had just passed, and was too much absorbed to hear the sound of approaching footsteps; therefore she was utterly unprepared for the surprise of meeting a stranger in the unfrequented path. But as she rounded an angle, she suddenly stopped short with a start, for she saw she was no longer alone, and a deep wave of colour swept across her cheek as she recognized in the supposed stranger none other than Lord Willoughby himself.

"Marry well met, Mistress Ursula," he said, taking her hand and saluting her with the frank ease of the soldier and the gentleman. "I will not feign surprise, as I had e'en come forth in expectation of this meeting. Thy sister

told me thou wert at Lady Beauchamp's house, and I came forth in hopes of finding thee alone."

Ursula's heart beat somewhat fast. Lord Willoughby had not turned to walk along the path towards home, but had bent his steps in another direction, as if he had something to say which needed time for discussion. Ursula walked by his side, half afraid of the feeling of gladness which had suddenly flooded her heart. Yet at first he spoke little of personal matters.

He told her of the deputation to the Queen, of her promise to send help, and of the terms of the treaty. He spoke of the Earl of Leicester's probable appointment as commander-in-chief of the expedition to be fitted out, and of the projected voyage of Drake to harry the Spaniards at sea.

And Ursula listened to it all, and caught his enthusiasm, as she was wont to do; and when he suddenly turned his gaze upon her, and saw the earnest kindling look upon her face, and the light which beamed in her eye, he stopped and suddenly asked in a voice which was singularly clear and low and sweet,—

"Ursula, wilt thou come with us?"

She started and lifted her eyes to his with bewilderment and questioning wonder. He stood still before her, and took her unresisting hands in his.

"Ursula, wilt thou be the wife of a plain soldier, who hath still his fighting before him, and hath no life of pleasant ease to offer to thee? There is work, notwithstanding, for thee as well as for me in yon downtrodden

country; and could I but go with thee at my side and my two brave boys, who must needs learn somewhat of the art of war, I could go with a light heart, and fight with my best for liberty and our Queen. But take I not thee with me, and at once I leave half my heart behind; and I ask thee, sweet Ursula, how can a man make shift to fight who hath but half a heart?"

There was a very frank and winning smile upon the soldier's face as he put this question, and Ursula could not but smile in reply. Encouraged by this, he drew slightly nearer, and said softly in her ear,—

"Ursula, sweetheart, I love thee. I can only speak my love in a few untutored words, for I have never taught my tongue the trick of smooth sayings; but the love is none the worse for that it is expressed thus in few words and blunt. Thou hast known me long enough, I trow, to know if thou canst grant me the boon I crave. Hast thou any love for me; and wilt thou consent to wed me in some haste, that I may have thee near me when I go whither my duty will shortly call?"

The words might be blunt, but that they were spoken in deep earnest could not be doubted; and Ursula's eyes sank beneath the ardent gaze bent upon her. Yet she let her hand lie in his clasp, and calling up her voice to answer his question, she said simply,—

"I do love you; and I will go with you gladly."

"What more changes and partings and extraordinary doings?" cried Barbara, when the news reached those

within the walls of the Manor-house. "Oh, why did I vow to follow the example of her most blessed Majesty, and keep a maid, when I might have had a gallant husband to follow to the wars?" and then seeing that her aunt's eyes were upon her in a sort of gentle reproof, she ran and perched herself upon her father's knee, putting her arms about his neck, and saying,—

"Sweet father, I prithee take me with thee when thou goest next to sea. I trow thou wilt not be far behind when Drake and others are slipping cables and spreading sail to the wind. And why should I not go with thee dressed as thy little son? Beshrew me if I make not a pretty boy, though as a maid I be too dark-browed and gipsy-like to win a husband's favour."

"Thou art a saucy, malapert wench, and hast learned to be forward with thy tongue since thou hast found favour with her Grace," answered the father, who nevertheless looked fondly and proudly at her. "Nay, lassie, 'tis no woman's work to be out on the high seas; but I will leave thee with the Court ere I go, and thou canst beguile the time of waiting with thy gaieties there." But at that Barbara shook her head, and answered that there were too few left now "at home" for her to desert the roof-tree more. There were always plenty of fine ladies to fill up vacancies amongst the Queen's maidens, and her post could be given to another ere an hour had passed by. But no other could be a sister to Bess, or a daughter to the mother who was losing her eldest daughter and her right hand.

"And I must needs stay to see after those little children who will be left behind with mother. Will she not have her hands full without the babes? And doth not the whole house say that no one after Ursula herself manages them as I do?"

"Go to; thou art a good child with all thy forward prattle, and thou shalt e'en please thyself and do thy duty to thy good aunt. In faith I would liefer leave thee here with her than amidst all the gay glitter of the court, which always maketh me fear that I shall never find my maid again, once I leave her there."

All was now stir and excitement, and news came almost daily as to the state of the negotiations in progress between England and the Provinces. The Queen was very close and shrewd in her dealings, and somewhat impaired her credit by her parsimony and determination to drive hard bargains, and insure herself against loss; but it was something to her credit that the fall of Antwerp (which need not have fallen had she been more prompt) rather urged her on in her resolve to carry through the matter than daunted her by the magnitude of the calamity to the Provinces. She ordered Drake to sail, which he did without so much as the delay of four-and-twenty hours, lest she should change her mind (which she did, but only after he was off and out of reach); a large number of volunteers threw themselves across the water immediately, to show that business was really meant; whilst troops were being rapidly accoutred, and arms collected; and Leicester, to whom the command was to be intrusted, was getting

together a band of soldiers at his own expense, which was to be the pride and wonder of Holland.

Certain towns, of which Flushing was one, were to be pledged to Elizabeth as a guarantee of good faith and the repayment of the loan she was making to the States; and Sir Philip Sidney was appointed governor of that place, and was eager to accept the offer made him by Lord Willoughby of accompanying him thither and giving him every aid in his power. His brother Robert was also to go, and many other gallant gentlemen; and as the town was far from the actual seat of war, was for the time being in English possession, and possessed every facility for transport to England should it be desirable, Willoughby did not hesitate to take thither his wife and two eldest sons, foreseeing that a large part of his life would henceforth be passed in the country, and wishing those who bore his name to grow to know it as he did himself.

It may not be denied that it was with a heavy heart and tearful eyes that the parents watched the departure of their daughter to this strange new life. They had lost one child by a fate worse than death, and peril seemed to beset the steps that were turned from their door. But Willoughby's face was bright and full of courage, and his wife's trust in him was boundless. He looked back at those standing to watch their departure, and promised it should not be long ere he saw them all again; and as it was thought that a few months would see the end of the protracted war, they all trusted that this promise would be speedily redeemed.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN FOREIGN LANDS.

"LADY WILLOUGHBY, I bid you welcome to your new home. I would I had been here earlier to offer you my poor services, and tell you how eagerly we have waited your coming. It is like golden summer come in the midst of winter's cheerless cold to see English faces in this fair city."

Ursula turned quickly to see by whom she was thus addressed. She was at the window of a great room overlooking the market-place of Flushing, the town-hall with its fine flight of steps being opposite. Weary with travel, and feeling somewhat as if still in a dream, she was yet full of curiosity at all she saw before her; and in the absence of her husband and Sir Philip Sidney and his brother, who had all been summoned to a conference with the authorities of the city, she was for a moment alone, the boys having dashed forth into the streets under the charge of some men-at-arms, wild with excitement at the novelty of all about them, and delighted by the welcome they everywhere met so soon as it was understood who they were and with what purpose they had come.

Sir Philip Sidney and Sir Thomas Cecil, the two gov-

ernors of the city, had been sumptuously lodged in a very fine house in the market-place; and as neither of these dignitaries had brought their wives with them, Lady Willoughby was by common consent elected to fill the place that otherwise would have been taken by the governor's lady. Lord Willoughby was Sidney's friend and comrade in arms, and he was needed both in the council-room and in the field. The arrival of the English, although made with no kind of pomp, in the damp and dark of the previous evening, had filled the whole town with joy. The great bell had pealed forth the glad intelligence to the country round, and the soldierly-looking man who had found his way to this apartment, and was thus addressing Lady Willoughby, looked as if he had ridden hard that morning in order to offer her his welcome and congratulations.

For a moment she gazed at him, as though hardly recognizing him, and then a sudden smile shone over her face, and extending her hand she said,—

"It is verily Lord Lisle. I crave you pardon, my lord, for my backwardness, but the dress and the lapse of time have somewhat changed you. In faith, I rejoice to see you thus early, and I have many charges in the shape of letters and packages and what not to deliver to you from the Earl your father and from Alianora."

"News from home is ever like water to the desert traveller," said Lisle, as he took the seat to which Ursula had motioned him, and removed the head-piece which shaded his features. His manner still preserved the old sweetness and grace, but the hard campaigning of the past eighteen

months had wrought a great change in his outward man. The face was tanned by exposure, and the features, whilst retaining their delicacy of outline, looked as if they had, as it were, been recast in a sterner mould. The eye had lost its dreaminess and some of its mirth, and was keen, watchful, and resolute. The lips looked as if they could easily form themselves to words of command, and the slight figure had attained a muscular wiriness and toughness which indicated an amount of physical training that could only have been gained through no inconsiderable fatigue and hardship.

"You are changed, my lord," said Ursula. "Methinks you have seen hard service. I trust you have not suffered from the rigours of the campaign?"

"We have all suffered," answered the viscount cheerfully. "A soldier expects hardship, and is prepared to meet it. Yet methinks had the extent of our need been known, others would have followed the example of my good father, and sent us the wherewithal to support life. My heart hath fairly bled for the poor fellows in our English companies, their clothes falling from their backs, and their shoes peeling from their feet, wandering the streets begging a bit of bread from the burghers to support life, and too often being refused, from the distrust of her Majesty's policy. It hath been a time of dreary waiting and watching; and hope deferred maketh indeed the heart sick. But the news that this treaty hath verily been signed hath set all our bells ringing, and hath filled us with glad thanksgiving. I trust the worst is now over, and that

with the coming spring we shall sweep every Spaniard from the soil. The woful state of the Provinces that have submitted and returned to their allegiance is a standing warning to Holland and Zeeland to remain stanch and firm; wherefore let but her Majesty be true to them, and we will with them deal such a buffet at her arch-enemy, the Most Catholic King, as shall make him totter on his throne, and give him occupation enough to keep his hands off England for a dozen years or more."

Some eager talk followed about the state of the country and of the troops, and the prospect of the coming campaign. Ursula was surprised and greatly pleased at the flourishing condition of brave little Holland, which, in spite of the long and weary struggle that had desolated Flanders, had increased in wealth and strength, and was strung up to a heroic pitch of courage and patriotism.

"I verily believe the people would cut through all their dikes, and give the land back again to the clutches of the devouring sea, sooner than that they would put their necks again beneath the hated yoke of Spain," said the viscount; "but methinks it will not come to that. Their trade, in spite of all, has grown and flourished. Their merchants and nobles alike are full of zeal for the cause; and let but England once stand with them, shoulder to shoulder in the good cause, and beshrew me if we give not that Spider such a shaking in his web as will set him quaking for his own safety, and teach him that he had best respect the liberties of his subjects, instead of seeking to rule them by fire and blood."

The grievous sufferings of the English troops greatly troubled Ursula, but she knew she had the necessary comforts and funds to relieve the most pressing necessities of the moment, at least for the poor garrison in Flushing. Lord Lisle was delighted to hear of the stores, public and private, that had been brought over to meet this need; yet after a discussion on this subject he turned to more personal matters, and asked question after question about his sister, his father, and Ursula's own family. After these had been answered, he looked a little away, playing with the hilt of his sword the while he spoke once again.

"I trow that you did take your way through London ere you started? Doubtless you saw fair Mistress Constance West and her good father; or perchance she is called no longer by that name, but hath changed her state, as fair maids do. But I trust that single or wedded she is yet in good health, and her father likewise?"

"My good uncle is ever the same, as it seemeth to me, and he hath made no small addition to our munitions for these poor men. Touching his daughter, who is not wed, and talks not of such a thing, she looked to me something less blooming than of yore, albeit she complains not of any indisposition. Her father says that she sits too close to her needle, for ever stitching at garments to be sent, as occasion offers, to our poor soldiers here in the Provinces. For a year or more, he tells us, her heart hath seemed more with the soldiers here than at home. And she is so eager for news from hence that she hath picked up more intelligence as to the state of affairs here than he hath himself

acquired in the way of business. Methinks she was half envious that it was my hap to journey here. But for her duty to her father, I verily believe she would have petitioned to come with me, as one of my ladies, so greatly doth her heart seem in this land."

The young soldier made no reply, yet a clearer light shone in his eye, and a slight flush mounted to his cheek, which Ursula did not observe. But he said no more, and was soon laughing over Ursula's account of their doleful and dirty walk into Flushing the previous night; for having been driven by stress of weather somewhat out of their course, they had been forced to land at Rammekins, and make their way on foot to Flushing, where they arrived in most humble fashion, though all discomfort was amply atoned for by the cordiality of the welcome accorded them.

Ursula had hardly got her story finished before the governors and their attendants returned from the town hall; and the whole party sat down to the mid-day meal. The information which had been furnished them by the town council, added to what the viscount could supply, told them that they had not indeed come too soon, and that the pressing need of the English troops must be their first care. Sidney wrote off an urgent despatch to his uncle the Earl of Leicester to hasten his coming. Then instead of giving himself over to a course of banquets and entertainments, such as the people would have delighted to offer him, he set to work to see what could be done for the present relief of the starving English troops; and together with Lady Willoughby and Viscount Lisle, whose experience made him

invaluable, he visited every quarter of the miserable garrison, bringing comfort and hope with him, and causing all hearts to beat high with confidence that at last her gracious Majesty of England had awakened to the magnitude of the stake before her, and would act in the prompt and efficient manner of an earnest ally.

And yet Sidney knew his royal mistress too well to cherish much confidence; and when Leicester still delayed his coming, he despatched Lord Willoughby in person to hasten his tardy movements, and give him private notice of the extreme need for promptness of action. Not to seize the present moment, when the people were full of enthusiasm for the English alliance, would be madness, and it was above all things important that the Governor of the Provinces should no longer delay his personal presence.

It seemed as if this last embassy were to be successful, for on the morning of the 9th of December, the two boys came eagerly rushing to their mother's room, ere she had left it, to tell her the news that was spreading like wild-fire through the town—namely, that a fleet of nigh upon fifty sail had been seen bearing down as if from England, and that the whole place was putting itself into gala array to welcome the great Earl, its new Governor.

Ursula's heart beat high at the thought of seeing her dear lord again, and an end put also to the state of uncertainty which had been trying to all. The bustle throughout the house and throughout the place told her that the rumour must indeed be true; and after she had been served with a repast in her own apartments, which she in-

sisted that the excited boys should share, she dressed herself with care in some robes not unbefitting a great occasion, and was not surprised to receive a message from Sidney to the effect that he and his retinue were about to start for the harbour to meet the earl and accord him a welcome, and requesting that Lady Willoughby would grace the deputation with her presence.

Ursula desired nothing better, and taking with her two of her ladies, the two boys, and some three or four gentlemen attendants who wore her husband's livery, she sallied forth from her rooms, and descended the wide staircase, to find the ever gallant Sir Philip waiting to conduct her to the court-yard, which seemed full of men and horses in gay trappings and shining armour, all eager, as it seemed, to be in motion to receive the great Earl upon his landing.

Ursula rode beside Sir Philip, the boys following like two pages. The streets were already draped with costly hangings, and bursts of music awoke the echoes as the party rode along. The people in holiday garb were thronging all the thoroughfares, most of them bound for the harbour like our party, who had some ado to make their way through the concourse. But at length the short distance was traversed, and Ursula, who had seldom been seawards before, thought that she had never seen a grander sight than was presented by that wide mouth of the West Scheldt, with its magnificent harbour crowded with shipping, each vessel being gaily decorated in honour of the arrival of the English fleet, which now, close at hand, was riding majestically upon the heaving water, slowly near-

ing the shore with every rise and fall of the incoming tide.

At the approach of the Governor a salvo of artillery was fired, which was answered by a salute from the English ships. Sir Philip dismounted and assisted Ursula to alight, and the whole party moved slowly forward to the spot where the Earl was to disembark. He was standing upon the deck of the foremost vessel, surrounded by "the flower and chief of English gallants;" and Ursula's quick eyes soon singled out her own husband, who, though less magnificent in dress and appointments than some of his companions, was inferior to none in quiet dignity of bearing and soldier-like gallantry of mien.

We have had somewhat too much in these pages of state banquets and gay pageantry, and space would fail to tell of all the gallant shows prepared by the rejoicing people of Holland for the welcome of their new Governor. Suffice it to say that after a brief stay at Flushing he made a tour through many cities—each one of which seemed resolved to furnish the strangest shows, the most gorgeous banquets, and the most lengthy orations—until he came at length to the Hague, where his head-quarters were to be, and where for the time being he halted. So far he had produced a favourable impression upon every one; and the gorgeousness of his person and his following was the wonder of those who had been used to the plain and unostentatious surroundings of the Prince of Orange. "Every man is marvelling at the great magnificence and splendour of his clothes," wrote one quaint chronicler from Utrecht; and indeed the

poor English had not been hitherto looked upon as persons who had much to spend upon personal adornment. The people were eager for the Earl to assume the Governor-generalship of the Provinces, which was tantamount to accepting the sovereignty; whereas his royal mistress, who had herself declined the proffered dignity, had straitly charged him to assume no greater dignity than that of lieutenant-general; and her favourite might have known better the autocratic temper of Henry's daughter than to provoke her displeasure by assuming a greater state than she had permitted him. And yet all his counsellors were of opinion that it ought to be done.

Somebody must take the place of commander, and now that the English had come to their aid, the Provinces were ready to trust them to the uttermost. Maurice of Nassau, although the elected stadtholder, was as wishful as any one to submit to the authority of the new Governor; and Leicester, flushed with triumph, and so elated by the reception he had received as to be disposed to grasp at anything offered which should add to his dignity, permitted himself to be advised, and accepted the new title, regardless of the peril of losing his standing with his royal mistress.

But with these public matters we have little concern, they can be read in the pages of every history of the times; and it is familiar to many how Elizabeth fumed and raged over the presumption and insubordination of her beloved Leicester, and then gradually forgave him when he feigned sickness at her displeasure. Many worthier men got into permanent trouble about the business, and the con-

duct of the favourite was anything but honourable; however, he still kept his hold upon the affections of the Queen, and despite the manifest incompetence he displayed, was taken back into favour, and graciously received upon his return.

But Ursula, who did not make one of the gay throng which accompanied the Earl upon his journey of state, was soon to find that there was a dismal side to the bright picture presented to the new General.

Whilst Leicester was airily writing to the Queen that before a year had passed every Spaniard would have been driven from the Provinces, she was wondering how poor soldiers were to be expected to fight when famine and disease were decimating their ranks, and when life was kept in them only through the liberality of private individuals. The state in which our troops in the Netherlands were left was one of those inexplicable blunders that disgrace the annals of our country. The most urgent representations from Sidney, Norris, and Leicester himself brought small assistance to them. The generals and gentlemen who had come over, either in a public or private capacity, did their utmost to meet this need, and were only too generous in despoiling themselves in order to relieve their starving countrymen, who, without pay and without clothes or food, were in the most hapless plight. But as all concerned in such matters know well, private liberality can do little to cope with distress on such a gigantic scale; and so long as the nation did not keep its plighted word in furnishing its own troops with such things as were neces-

sary, it was impossible but that distress on a large and increasing scale should result from the neglect. No doubt there was much blundering and peculation, and that funds were sent out which never reached those for whom they were intended. But be this as it may, the distress of that long wet winter in Holland was never forgotten by Ursula; and although her husband sometimes told her with a sort of sad pride that her honeymoon was but a sorry one, spent in tending the sick and ministering to the famished and naked, she would answer with a smile that she wished for nothing better, and that she would not have been away from his side at such a time for all the ease and plenty in the world.

And indeed there were many hundreds of poor creatures in Flushing who blessed the very ground she trod upon, and who must certainly have died had she not been there, or had she come empty-handed. Flushing was in a state almost more deplorable than any other place; and Sidney, as governor, felt himself personally responsible for doing what was possible for the relief of the distressed soldiers. As his official duties engrossed much of his time, and he frequently had to attend summonses from his uncle, who relied much on his judgment and capacity, he was glad enough to depute his authority to Ursula in all such matters, and she found in very truth that her hands were full to overflowing.

Her first step was to get the control of some large building conveniently situated, which would form a hospital for the sick, as well as a refuge for the most destitute

of the men. The constant rain and the fog and mist which hung about the country during the winter months seemed to bring in their train much sickness and ague, especially amongst those so greatly reduced by lack of food and clothing. At first Ursula received little assistance from the Dutch themselves. Welcome as was the alliance with the English in theory, and great as had been the demonstrations of joy at their arrival, the honest townsfolk not unnaturally felt that so rich a country as England ought to be able to provide her soldiers with necessaries, without expecting help from the Provinces, when they had all the burdens of a long and exhausting war to support. Then it is never possible entirely to avoid jealousy and trifling causes of offence when two nationalities are in close contact with each other; and although these never broke out into open hostility, as is too often the case with allies, there was a latent antagonism between the Dutch and English troops which alienated the townspeople from the latter, and made Ursula's task decidedly more difficult in the first instance. But her gentle dignity and unfailing courtesy, and the respect and affection she everywhere inspired, won their way at last over incipient distrust or antagonism; and before she had been two months in their midst, the good burghers and townspeople of Flushing were her very good friends, and her labours were much lightened by the kindly aid she received from private persons, and the facilities granted for her work by the city authorities.

She had need to have her hands and her mind full just

now, for her husband's duties took him often from her side, and she knew that he was exposed to peril and hardships which she could not share with him. Open warfare in winter was impossible; Parma's troops, like their own, were in winter quarters, and, as report said, suffering as severely from want and neglect as the poor English. Yet many dangers still awaited those who were earnestly working for the deliverance of the States from the Spanish yoke; and foremost amongst these was Lord Willoughby, who never could be brought to see the half-heartedness of his royal mistress, and whose whole soul was in the struggle which his sagacity told him was but the forerunner of an equally determined effort to subjugate England.

Ursula never tried to hinder her lord from following the call of duty, even when it took him from her side. She was too true a wife and too true a patriot not to have her heart in the cause, and she was surrounded by friends and countrymen, her hands full to overflowing of work, whilst the two boys, who were as her own, were always left with her as companions and protectors. Sir Philip Sidney and his brother Robert remained most of their time at Flushing, and under the same roof with her, so that, all things considered, she had much cause for satisfaction. Only there were moments when a longing would come over her for the sight of a home face, or the sound of one of the dear familiar voices; and sometimes as she threaded her way through the rows of beds wherein the sick soldiers lay, or saw how low supplies were running, and how little chance

the governor of the city thought there was of any answer to their constant appeals to England, a great longing would come over her for the assistance of the practical Bess, or the cheerful encouragement of her brothers. She felt sometimes that if she could but have some of the dear home party with her, she could do tenfold more than she was able to accomplish single-handed; and although the longer days of spring were bringing hopes of less rigorous weather to follow, the cold and the rain still continued, and her stores were melting fast away—so fast that she did not like to ask what would happen when she had no more private reserves to fall back upon.

She was musing thus one day, as she retraced her steps from her daily visits to the troops, rather graver than was her wont on account of some rumours she had heard from the commanding officer, of suspicions rapidly gaining ground with reference to the Queen's attitude towards her allies. It was rumoured that she was already weary of her bargain, and was coquetting with Spain as to a peace both for herself and the States, without troubling to ask her allies whether they would consent to such a negotiation. The bare idea of making terms with the oppressor filled the Dutch with fury; they would sooner perish to a man than submit to the hated yoke. And there were ugly suspicions that the Queen meditated treachery with regard to the towns now in her hands (Flushing amongst them), placed there as pledges of good faith. It was said that she might hand these over to Philip, in order to secure good terms for herself; and although Ursula could not believe such

treachery possible, the bare thought of it filled her with dismay, for she plainly saw how unpopular the English would become, and how hopeless their case, if once this opinion gained ground amongst the townsfolk and the Dutch soldiery.

No wonder that her face was grave and her manner preoccupied as she mounted the long flight of steps leading to the little postern door by which she generally entered the house. Had she been through the court-yard she would have been aware that some arrival had recently taken place, for the court was still full of confusion and bustle; but she generally used this smaller entrance, which was near the door of her own apartments, and thus she was utterly unprepared for what was to follow, and almost believed herself dreaming when she heard an ecstatic cry of "Ursula! Ursula!" and felt a pair of arms about her neck, clasping her almost to suffocation.

"Bess!" she exclaimed, "Bess, is it really thee? or am I dreaming?—And father likewise! Nay, I can scarce believe mine eyes. I wake sometimes and know that I have seen you all in dreams.—Ivo—Gilbert—nay, now this can be but fantasy.—O sweet father, tell me I do not dream; yet methinks I must wake to find you all gone."

The warm strong clasp of the father's arms went far to assure Ursula that this was no dream. Yet it was long ere the happy tumult of voices died down, or she could begin to learn what had happened to bring them hither; and the next surprise was in the appearance of the rich

and portly figure of the merchant West, who greeted his niece with equal warmth as of old, but with a greater amount of ceremony, as if he alone of all the party remembered the position which she occupied.

Ursula led the way into her reception rooms, where already the servants were making ready a hospitable meal. There was no heeding Mr. Furnival's suggestion that the party should find quarters for themselves in the town. Ursula scouted such a notion as utterly preposterous. The great house in which she was lodged, and of which she was practical mistress, had room enough and to spare, and her own private suite of apartments was sufficient to lodge the party, save the merchant, who was placed somewhat farther away.

"And oh, it is so good to see some home faces again!" said Ursula, looking from one to the other. "And yet I would fain learn what hath brought you all hither thus suddenly."

"Marry, that is soon told," quoth Mr. Furnival, laughing. "Thou knowest how thy brothers have been wild for the war ever since his Most Catholic Majesty thought good to seize our ships and send our good sailors to the galleys. And every letter from thee, telling us of the state of things here, filled them with new ardour and longing to be up and doing; and with the winter passing and the chance of fighting before their eyes, beshrew me if I could hold the lads back, try as I would. We have not been idle at home all these months, I can tell thee, daughter. Thy mother's wheel and thy sister's too have been going

almost night and day; and when I have asked the wife why, with so small a household, she works so much the harder, her answer ever was, 'Those poor soldiers in Flushing! I cannot get them out of my thoughts. I am happiest when I am working for them;' and Bess, if she did not say as much, pursed her wise lips together and looked as if she had her heart in her work to some purpose."

"Dear mother,—sweet Bess,—how I thank you for such good thoughts!—But go on, good father; I thirst to hear more."

"Thou shalt hear all anon. As I say, we have been stirred in spirit all these months; and it was but a couple of short weeks back, or little more, that thy uncle there rode up to our door, bringing his daughter with him. The maid, he said, seemed to be pining somewhat in the air of the town, and he remembered how blooming she had looked in bygone days when she was with us, so he e'en brought her down to place her under thy mother's care; whilst he, with a good sloop filled with comforts for our poor fellows here, was to set sail for Flushing, to bring them relief and learn the true state of affairs here, which it is so hard to do without coming to see with one's own eyes."

Ursula turned a grateful glance upon the merchant and murmured some words of thanks.

"If only thou knewest how sore the need is! I know not how to thank thee aright."

"Tush, maiden—I crave pardon, I should say your ladyship; but I forget my manners in the sight of thy

sweet face, all unchanged from when thou wert a guest beneath my poor roof. Nay, thinkest thou that we London merchants mean to let our countrymen starve, whatever laggard statesmen may do? Fie upon them, say I, for deluding her Majesty, and putting ideas into her gracious mind that would never find entrance there maugre their plotting, were she but left to use her wise head unchecked! But no man shall say that mine own niece hath not bread to put into the mouths of the men who hold the place of which she is the fair protectress. And thy father will tell the rest."

"The rest is soon told. The lads had scarce heard that their uncle was bound for Flushing when cords would not have held them back. To fight the Spaniards under the English banner and beneath the eye of Lord Willoughby or Sir Philip Sidney was in all sooth enough to stir their young blood. I could not say them nay; even their mother felt that the time had come, and she hungered so for more certain news of thee, child, that she was fain to bid me go with them and bring her word again."

"Dear mother! it was sweetly thought of her. I would she had come hither herself, that I might hold her in mine arms again."

"Nay, the mother hath her hands too full to leave. Our Honora's little son is but six weeks old, and she hath the main care both of mother and child; and, moreover, thy good uncle Gammage hath come once again to Wyndgate Manor, as he hath been wounded anew in these glorious feats of arms with which all the world is ringing. I

would thou couldest hear him tell the tale of the singeing of the beard of the King of Spain, as our brave sailors call it, when Drake and his little squadron sailed from place to place that the Spaniards call their own, sacking, plundering, destroying, and showing that a handful of English soldiers could afford to laugh at the might of the wonderful empire his majesty thinks he hath founded in the Western seas. Ah, thy brothers are wild that they were not there, and marry I could find it in my heart to wish that they had been. Hast heard of these exploits here, my daughter? But, in sooth, I wot they bring news hither as fast as to England."

"I have indeed heard that glorious victories have been won by our soldiers there; but I have not seen those who have been concerned in them. I would I could hear our brave uncle tell the tale."

"I would thou couldest," cried Gilbert with sparkling eyes. "Listen, and I will tell thee how our bold sea-captain acts, and how he makes our English flag respected. It was, methinks, at San Domingo. He had sailed into the harbour nighest, and told the people he would spare them and their city if they would satisfy him by the payment of a ransom. So negotiations were opened, which lasted long; but he was patient and broke not his word. One day he sent a message to the governor by a negro boy, who carried, as usual, a flag of truce. The boy came back wounded to death, and died ere he could tell who had thus misused him. Now listen to what our Drake did. It was but a negro who had been hurt, yet that negro was

under the protection of our flag, and the blood of our men boiled as if he had been their brother. Drake summoned his provost-marshal and a guard, and ordered two friars to be selected from the prisoners in his hands; and promptly they were led to the place where the crime had been committed, and there they were hung. 'I hang two more on the same spot,' said Drake, 'every day until the man who did the deed is given up.' Within an hour the criminal was led to him—a Spanish officer of no mean rank. 'Let his own countrymen execute him,' said Drake; and the Spaniards were forced to do it. And after that day no man ever dared to defy the English flag or the usages of war. They knew with whom they had to deal. Small wonder if his name carries terror wherever it is heard, or that his own sailors would lay down their lives for his lightest command. I trow such men as he are needed to lower the pride of yon haughty monarch, who sits so calmly in his cabinet plotting how England is to be his prey. I would I could have seen *his* face when that news was brought him. I marvel if he still think he may set foot on the soil of England whilst she hath a single sail at sea or a single son to fight for her liberties at home."

"The cockerel croweth lustily for his years, doth he not?" quoth Mr. Furnival with a smile; but yet there was no resisting the enthusiasm which prompted the words, and every heart beat high with anticipation at the thought of the hoped-for campaign. Slow as action was in coming, it was not believed for a moment that it would

be possible to avoid taking the field as soon as the weather permitted it. Yet Lord Willoughby came back something discouraged from his last journey to the Hague, bringing word that Leicester was unaccountably lethargic in his movements, and that it seemed as if his arm were tied by the commands of a mistress who never was in the same mind long together; whilst his whole soul was far more wrapped up in his eagerness to find a way back to her favour than to forward the cause of the oppressed States.

Parma's army was in sorry case. The King of Spain's losses in the Western world had caused him to draw the purse-strings tighter than ever. Willoughby was of opinion that if a well-munitioned army could but take the field promptly, every Spanish soldier might be swept over the frontier within three months; but Leicester would not listen to his counsel. The impression was gaining ground that the Queen was secretly negotiating a peace with the enemy. The enthusiasm which had greeted the arrival of the Earl had now given place to suspicion and misgiving; and those whose hearts were really in the cause were growing distracted and irritated to the last degree.

Ursula, in spite of all this and her own misgivings, was unable, however, to yield to the general depression, through the gladness of heart inspired by the presence of her sister, and the home-like feeling given to this strange house now that her father was living beneath its roof. Flying visits were not the order of those days; and although Mr. Furnival had not intended to stay long, he

settled down for a time to study this new country, and assist his daughter in her many enterprises on behalf of her countrymen. The spell which had fallen upon so many soon fell upon him, and he longed to see some decisive blow struck at the common foe before he should be obliged to leave for England.

Ursula's daily round of duties was greatly lightened and sweetened by the companionship of Bess; and the ample stores provided by the generosity of her uncle and his merchant friends, and by the forethought of those at home, enabled her to meet the future with a lighter heart. The sickness amongst the men was rapidly abating; the patients who had recovered through her kindly care were furnished with clothes ere they were sent out into the lines again. There was some hope of obtaining a part of their pay through an imperative request which Leicester had forwarded to London; and some small operations were commenced nearer to the frontier, in the relief of certain towns beleaguered by the Spaniards. Provisions had been thrown into Grave, which had been greatly reduced by famine. But the next news which electrified the country with dismay was that the place had yielded to Parma without striking a blow; and Venloo very shortly fell much in the same way. The traitor who had yielded up Grave was hanged by Leicester; but that did not give the city back, and the moral effect was so bad that the soldiers in Flushing were on the eve of a mutiny, believing their cause betrayed; and had not the money for a part of the arrears of pay arrived in the

very nick of time, the result might have been disastrous in the extreme.

Sir Philip, who had looked worn and harassed for many weeks, came in after seeing the claims of the men satisfied, and throwing himself down, wearily exclaimed,—

"At least after this there can be no farther dallying. If we rest longer idle, all is lost. I will to my uncle to-morrow, matters being now tranquil here, and speak to him in all seriousness. For the honour of our country some blow *must* be struck."

But the speaker little knew as he uttered these words what that same blow was to cost himself and his country.

CHAPTER XVII.

WARFARE.

"NOW Heaven be praised!" said Sir Philip Sidney, who entered travel-stained and weary from a rapid journey to the Hague. "It hath pleased my good uncle to listen to warlike counsels, and we are to sit in idleness here no longer."

Lord Willoughby and Viscount Lisle, who were seated upon a balcony enjoying the freshness of the evening air, together with Ursula and the two lads, sprang to their feet with an exclamation of joy, and eagerly demanded the details of the project.

"Hath he listened to the representations of Prince Maurice with regard to Axel?" asked Willoughby with all eagerness.

"Ay, that he hath. 'Twas to confer with me thereon that he sent for me thus privately, and I have since been on an errand to the Prince; but, save ourselves, no living soul knows of the proposed enterprise. All depends upon secrecy and despatch; for if whispers of our project get abroad, the false security in which the garrison lives will be exchanged for watchfulness and an attitude of defence."

"And the plan?" asked Willoughby with the abruptness of a soldier; "hath it been well laid?"

"I trust so, since the Prince and I have had the laying of it," answered Sidney with a smile; and turning to Ursula with his unfailing and winning courtesy, he proceeded to explain something of the situation to her, for her whole heart was in the cause, and any enterprise in which her lord was to take part was full of interest to her.

"You doubtless know, sweet lady, that the town of Axel is very strongly fortified, and lies upon the south-west edge of this same Western Scheldt, whereon this fair city stands, though many miles farther from the sea, and but a league from Ter Neuse?"

Ursula made a sign of assent. She had listened to discussions with regard to this place before, and had heard it said that to possess it would be a great gain to the States. It would give them a firmer grip upon Sluys and Ostend, and afford them many opportunities of annoying and harassing the Spanish troops in Flanders.

"Our plan is this," continued Sidney, addressing himself to the whole party, who all hung upon his words:—"The Earl my uncle to draw off attention from our real enterprise, will proceed to Bergen-op-Zoom with some five hundred English troops, and you, my Lord Willoughby, will join him there, and take command of these same troops, bringing them by night to join the rendezvous here upon these broad waters, where my Zeelanders will be in readiness; and we shall proceed quietly in our great

flat-bottomed boats to Ter Neuse, where Maurice will join us with his Netherlanders. Then all together we march upon Axel, which we should reach just before dawn; and if it is as carelessly guarded as report saith, it will fall an easy prey, an we take it by surprise. Having secured that, I trust we may press on and vanquish La Motte at Gravelines; yet I fear we must be content with one step at a time. My heart is glad within me to think we are stirred up to action at last. I have more than half feared that some treachery hath been at work at home or abroad."

Such, indeed, had been the prevailing impression in many quarters, but the prospect of action dispersed the gathering shades, and doubt and despondency were replaced by enthusiasm and energy; whilst, at the same time, strict secrecy was observed, so that no rumour as to the attack might get abroad.

Joyful indeed were Ursula's brothers at the thought of seeing real warfare at last. They had been enrolled in a gallant little troop commanded by Viscount Lisle, and equipped for the most part at his expense. His brave little band of volunteers had done good service before now in the Netherlands, and there was a good-fellowship and sense of *camaraderie* in its ranks which was pleasant to behold. Ivo and Gilbert had been received gladly into its number, and no hearts were beating more bravely and eagerly than those of the two English recruits. They had both been receiving regular military training for many years at home; for the mustering of volunteers and train-bands had been going on in all parts of the kingdom for

a long time, in preparation for the expected war, so that the youths were neither raw nor ignorant of their duties, and their horsemanship and agility were above the average.

How fast did Ursula's heart beat upon that still mid-summer night, as she saw the dark outlines of the great flotilla lying silent on the gently-heaving bosom of the wide Scheldt. The boys stood one on each side of her, holding her hands, and watching in breathless excitement for the coming of their father's contingent of English troops; and when, an hour or two before midnight, a stir amongst the boats and a general cautious movement told them that the junction had been effected, they could scarce restrain their shouts of joy, and were almost ready to mutiny against the paternal order which kept them to the shore and their mother's side, when they longed to be with the soldiers, striking a blow for freedom.

It was long before Ursula could get the excited boys to bed, and there was no sleep for her that night. She had not been a soldier's wife long enough yet to have learned the art of sleeping in her bed whilst her lord was imperilling his life in some battle or assault.

The dawn found her again in her old vantage-spot, looking out over the housetops upon the broad waters of the Scheldt; and all day long she moved restlessly from place to place, starting at every sound, and hearing in every tread the footfall of a messenger come with tidings from her lord.

But the sun had set ere she received full certainty of success, though rumours of a great victory had been flying

about the town for many hours. She had just compelled herself to sit down to the customary evening meal, and was trying to compose herself to patience, when the sound of horse-hoofs in the court-yard sent the two boys flying off, like arrows shot from a bow; and the next moment Robert came rushing back shouting that there had been a great victory—that Lord Lisle had come back bringing Gilbert with him, who had been wounded in the fray—and that their father and the rest were all on the road, and would be with them anon.

Ursula rose in haste, but had scarce reached the door before she was met by the viscount, who supported Gilbert's faltering steps.

"A mere scratch," said the lad, smiling bravely; "naught to bring that look to thy face, sweet sister.—Thanks, boy," as Robert brought him a stoup of wine, which he drained thirstily.—"Nay, heed me not; let me only sit still and hear Lisle tell the story. Marry, I knew not what a grand thing war was till I was in the thick of it. I would not have missed it for a score of slashes like this."

Lisle reassured Ursula on her brother's account, telling her the hurt had been seen to, and it was but the journey from the harbour which had somewhat wearied the lad. He was even disposed to take his share of the meal, and Lord Lisle professed himself half starved; and so the viands were hospitably heaped upon the travellers' plates, and the servants stood round eager to hear the news; whilst the viscount, as he satisfied the cravings of hunger, told his tale in few and graphic words.

"All went well, as things are wont to do with such leaders as we had over us. There was no blundering and no delay. My Lord Willoughby was true to the moment in joining us here, and the States troops were all drawn up in readiness ere we disembarked at Ter Neuse. Before the clocks chimed two we were before the wall of Axel, when we were pulled up short by the moat, which was of extraordinary depth and width, and seemed like for a brief moment to put in peril our enterprise. But water was never a foe to Englishmen; and ere we had had time to take counsel together, forth step thy two brothers, fair Lady Willoughby, and forty men behind them, volunteering to swim the trench, and carry their ladders with them, slay the guard, and open the gates to the rest of the army."

"And they did it?" cried Ursula, her eyes shining with excitement.

"Ay, marry, they did—swam like veritable water-rats. I trow this lad and his brother were amongst the first to land on the other side. The guard—traitorous fellows—were sleeping in their beds, and fell an easy prey. The gates were opened to us, and the garrison, who offered gallant resistance when it was too late, were slain. Not one of our side lost his life, and but a score or two were wounded, of which this brother of thine is one. But he hath won the good opinion of our gallant commander, Sir Philip Sidney, and that of other generals beside, and hath been publicly thanked by them for his prowess—as all the advance-guard were—and I wot he heeds not a scratch that hath been so gloriously won."

The popular enthusiasm over this victory was great. It seemed to counteract the bad effect of the losses sustained at Grave and Venloo, and to raise alike the spirits of troops and people. The attempt to surprise Gravelines, however, was unsuccessful, the veteran La Motte being on the alert, and not to be caught off his guard as his colleagues had been. But the reputation gained by Sir Philip Sidney and his fellow-chiefs by the surprise of Axel ought not, they felt, to be allowed to melt through subsequent inaction. The gallant Sidney had not come to the States to remain idle at Flushing, and Lord Willoughby was as keen as ever after the glories of war; therefore they both decided to quit that place and join the Earl of Leicester at Arnheim, from which place important operations could be undertaken, if they could but bring him to the point.

And Leicester did appear disposed in some measure to follow up the first victory. His next move was to reduce Doesburg, which, somewhat to the disappointment of the younger soldiers, surrendered without striking a blow; and when that place was in his power, he turned his attention towards Zutphen, which was occupied by Spanish troops, but was so badly victualled that it was thought it might easily be reduced by famine.

Zutphen, as a glance at the map will show, is a town upon the river Yssel, and its importance to the patriots arose from the fact that its possession would give them the command of the entire river, as the other towns upon its banks were in their hands. The valley in which the city stood was very wide and flat, plains fertile in summer, but

much submerged during the winter floods, stretching away into the distance almost as far as eye could see. The city was protected on one side by the river and a little fortified village, and on the other by a wall and moat; whilst beyond the river there were three strong sconces and a fortified island, which gave it additional protection. Therefore, as things went in those days, it would not be an easy place to take by storm; but let the garrison be but starved out, and it might fall an easy prey.

Sir Philip Sidney and Sir John Norris established themselves in a fortified camp on one side of the river, whilst the Earl of Leicester constructed a bridge of boats and prepared to attempt the reduction of the forts on the other side. But the Duke of Parma, who was quite aware of the value of the town, was not to be caught napping, and at once marched to its relief, determined to throw in provisions sufficient to last the garrison and people at least three months.

News of the approach of the relief-party was quickly brought to the hostile camp; and Lord Willoughby, after conferring with Sidney and Norris, crossed the bridge of boats to Leicester's camp to see what preparations were made there.

The news of the probable attempt to victual the city was known to the Earl; but he assured Willoughby that the convoy would be but very insufficiently guarded, and that a small number of troops would be enough to surprise and overpower it. He had been taking counsel with that strange soldier-renegade, Rolande Yorke, and was

full of confidence in an easy victory; and Willoughby returned to his companions with the news that the main army would still retain its position on the other side of the river, leaving the troops upon this side to do the work.

There was no particular misgiving in the minds either of soldiers or commanders. It was not thought that Parma had many men to spare to send on this expedition; and English and Dutch troops were alike full of courage and confidence. Norris, with two hundred cavalry and three hundred pikemen, was to form an ambuscade upon the road by which the convoy was to approach, whilst a larger reserve, which was not expected to be required, was held in readiness some distance off, but in such a position (owing to Leicester's bad generalship) that it could not reach the smaller body with any speed or ease.

The morning of the expected battle or skirmish, whichever it was to prove, dawned foggy and chill. Leicester, somewhat anxious when the moment arrived, crossed the river in person, and with him the flower of English chivalry who were on his side of the river. He was met on the other side by the two Sidneys, the Norrises, and Willoughby, and the whole little band moved merrily forward through the fog in the direction which the troops had taken who were to form the ambuscade.

As the gallant cavalcade rode bravely forward in the uncertain light, Sir Philip Sidney observed that the veteran lord-marshal, Sir William Pelham, was but lightly armed for the fray.

"How now, good sir!" quoth the gallant Sidney; "this

must not be. It were no light matter should a flying bullet or fierce sword-thrust light upon thy person thus undefended;" and beckoning to his young esquire—none other than Gilbert Furnival, who had, to his immense pride and delight, been promoted to that place—he bid him unfasten the cuishes, or thigh-plates of mail which protected his legs, and buckle them upon those of the elder man instead.

Sir William protested in vain; Sidney insisted, and got his own way.

"In faith, I feel wondrous relieved by the absence of such cumbersome trappings," he said. "I warrant me I shall fight all the better without them."

Gilbert reluctantly performed the task set him, and whispered to his brother, who was esquire now to Lord Willoughby, that he feared for his dear lord's safety if he persisted in riding into battle thus lightly armed. But there was no time to remonstrate further, even had remonstrance been of any avail; for the little troop had hardly taken up its position beside the trained soldiers, who had been waiting there since daybreak, before the distant rumble of waggon-wheels became distinctly audible, and the whisper passed from mouth to mouth,—

"They come—they come!"

The cavalry reined in their horses in readiness, setting their teeth hard, and gazing expectantly through the fog in the direction whence the trampling of horse-hoofs and the groaning of wheels warned them of the approach of the enemy. And then all in a moment the curtain of fog

lifted and rolled back, and displayed to their astonished eyes, not the expected convoy with a small escort, but a guard of some thousands of picked Spanish troops—troops which Parma had raised the siege of Rheinberg to send, and which contained the flower of his veteran regiments.

For one moment the gallant five hundred stood motionless, gazing on the serried ranks before them; but there was not a thought of retreat. It was a fine sight, in all truth—long, deep columns of pikemen and musketeers lining the hedgerows on either side, whilst between the close ranks lumbered the heavy waggons laden with corn and wine and food of every description for the straitened garrison in the town, who, apprised of the coming of the relief-party, were prepared to issue out of the gate in hundreds and thousands to assist in bringing in the provisions.

No time was there for deliberation; and but one thought was in the minds of those gallant soldiers. Sir John Norris, who had had some quarrel with Sir William Stanley before the walls of Doesburg, now held out his mailed hand to him, crying out,—

"There hath been ill blood betwixt us ere now; but let us be friends this day, and die side by side, if need be, in her blessed Majesty's service."

And whilst Stanley seized the proffered hand, and vowed, living or dying, to be thenceforward his friend, the young Earl of Essex, general of the horse, looked round at his handful of troopers, and cried,—

"Follow me, good fellows, for the honour of England and of England's Queen!"

And forthwith the whole gallant little band dashed forward at full gallop, in a charge as magnificent—and as useless—as one which almost three centuries later sent a thrill throughout the civilized world.

It was more like a series of hand-to-hand encounters than a battle. The onslaught was so fierce that the horsemen dashed completely through the ranks of the enemy, killing and mowing them down by dozens as they rode, and then, re-forming and wheeling with incredible rapidity, dashed once more upon them, compact as an arrow-head, dealing death and destruction with every blow.

Retiring sometimes before a volley of musket-shot, they rapidly re-formed and fell once and again on the pikemen. Lord Lisle lay about him with his cutlass so fiercely and withal so merrily that he was pronounced to be "a very devil" by his adversaries. Lord Willoughby rode straight at the celebrated George Crescia, general of those famous Albanian cavalry, and unhorsed him at the first shock.

"I yield myself gladly to thee as thy prisoner," cried the vanquished soldier in French, "for thou art a *preux chevalier*."

Trusting his captive's word, and having no wish to be hindered, Willoughby dashed onwards with his handful of men into the very thick of the enemy, where he seemed to be swallowed up in their vast masses. His horse was shot under him, his basses were shot away from his legs, and he all but fell into the hands of the enemy as a prisoner. But Ivo, who had followed him closely, caught the bridle of a riderless horse, and Willoughby sprang like

lightning on to its back, and the two, whirling their axes round their heads, charged so furiously through the foe that they reached in safety their own comrades, who had never looked to see them living again.

Well might a bard thus characterize the gallant Willoughby, whose name was so often to ring over the plains of the Netherlands,—

> "The brave Lord Willoughby,
> Of courage fierce and fell,
> Who would not give an inch of way
> For all the devils in hell."

For an hour and a half the desperate encounter lasted, the gallant little band returning again and again to the charge, as if resolved not to own to themselves how hopeless was the struggle in which they were engaged. Many times the Spaniards wavered. Hannibal Gonzaga, their leader, fell mortally wounded; but the numbers pressing on from behind filled up the gaps in the ranks, and the laden waggons, though many of them shattered and useless, still continued to crawl along the pathway, now slippery with blood.

And yet, strange to relate, despite the terrible character of the contest, and the tremendous odds against which they fought, the loss in the English ranks was inconsiderable, and had it not been for one fatal casualty, the charge at Zutphen would have left the English people little to regret. But one life was there thrown away the loss of which cast a gloom over the whole country, and was even mourned in Spanish cities, and by Philip of Spain himself.

Sir Philip Sidney, ever at the front where the contest was hottest, had borne himself right gallantly through the fight. In the very first charge his horse had been shot under him; but he had gained possession of another animal, a fine charger full of life and spirit, upon which, like a veritable centaur, he charged backwards and forwards through the serried ranks of the foe, dealing death and destruction wherever he went. Gilbert, who closely followed him, thought he must bear a charmed life, for his peril in his half-armed state was far greater than that of his comrades, and yet he escaped time after time unscathed.

It was obvious to all that the contest could not be prolonged much longer. The looked-for reserves never came up, the ranks of the brave five hundred were broken and scattered, and many of the men were lying dead or disabled on the field. The chief of the fighting had been done by that gallant little band of volunteers, the flower of the English chivalry, and even now these soldier spirits were unwilling to leave the field.

"Form again! One more charge for the honour of England!" cried Sir William Stanley, perhaps one of the bravest and most reckless spirits there, and his words were echoed with enthusiasm by every knight present. So once again the fierce charge was repeated, and again for a moment the Spanish soldiers wavered and recoiled before the shock. But a musket-ball struck Sir Philip above the knee, in a place which should have been protected by the armour so generously bestowed by him on his comrade earlier in the day, shattering the bone, and causing such

agony of pain that for a moment the soldier reeled in the saddle, and might have fallen, but that Gilbert was at his side and upheld him till the spasm had passed.

"You are wounded, good my lord," he cried with anxious eyes; but Sidney turned upon him with a brave smile.

"Ay, my lad, I trow I am; but not so grievously but that I can yet strike a blow for her Majesty's honour." And to the surprise and dismay of his attendant, he plunged once more into the *mêlée*. But it was plain he was utterly unfit for further fighting. How he kept his seat on horseback at all was a marvel; and the spirited creature he rode, who felt in a moment that his rider had but little power of control, began to grow so restive and impetuous that Gilbert expected every moment to see the wounded hero fall, to be crushed to death beneath the press of men and steeds.

Riding up, therefore, once again, and this time with Lord Willoughby, to whom he had communicated the fact of Sidney's condition, they persuaded the knight to turn away from the now hopeless contest, and make for the English intrenchments.

"It is hard to turn one's back upon the foe," said Sidney, with a lingering glance backwards, the fire still shining in his eyes, though his face was deadly white and contracted by pain; "but if I go with thee, good Willoughby, I go in good company."

Willoughby's glance sought his friend's face, full of commiseration and anxiety.

"I fear me thou art sorely hurt," he said; and Sidney's

smile was hardly reassuring with all its brave sweetness.

"It is never a sore hurt that is gotten in a good cause," he said. "What need a soldier wish for better than to lay down his life for her blessed Majesty?"

"Marry, to live and fight for her again," was Willoughby's answer; and then noting the extreme pain in Sidney's face, he spoke in low tones to Gilbert, saying,—

"Ride on, boy, and bring to us a bottle of water. He is nigh fainting from thirst and pain."

Gilbert set spurs to his horse, galloped into the lines, and quickly obtaining what he asked for, as he told the sad tale of his master's hurt, had galloped back to the field ere the wounded Sidney had reached its limit.

"Nay now, good lad, I thank thee heartily for this boon," said Sidney, his eyes brightening as he saw the water-bottle in his esquire's hands, for the raging thirst he suffered was almost more unendurable than the pain of his wound. Yet even as the bottle was opened and handed to him, his eye fell upon a dying soldier at his very feet, who was looking up with mute wistfulness at the draught for which his parched lips had been longing, as he lay hopeless and past help. And as he caught the glance of those dying eyes, Sidney bent from the saddle and placed the untouched flask in the hands of the poor soldier.

"Drink, good comrade," he said, in those gentle tones which penetrated even to the clouded senses of the dying, "for thy need is sorer than mine, and methinks thou hast eaten thy last at this same feast to-day."

Lord Willoughby made a motion as if to interfere, but Sidney gave him a look which checked him, and watched with a smile in his eyes whilst the soldier drained the flask, and murmured his blessing upon the head of his noble benefactor. Gilbert had already dashed off to the camp once again, and Sidney, too faint and spent to wish to move, stood looking thoughtfully down at the stricken man, who, now that the agony of his thirst was assuaged, seemed to be falling into the blessed torpor which so often in such cases precedes death and robs it of its terrors.

"See," he said to Willoughby, who was watching him with anxious eyes, "it is, methinks, no such hard thing to die, provided a man does but die doing his duty by his country and his Queen, like yon poor fellow. See that he is cared for, good Willoughby, and that he be not left to fall alive into the hands of the foe."

Gilbert in a few minutes more rode up again with more water, and Sidney, with another of his strange smiles, pledged the dying man in a draught.

"Methinks we shall meet again ere long, good comrade," he said dreamily; and as he heard a smothered exclamation as of grief or protest from Gilbert, he turned to him with that singular luminous sweetness of expression which had ever been noted as especially characteristic of him, and said,—

"Nay now, what better could you wish for me? Hath it not ever been said of old that they whom the gods love die young? And is there not somewhat of mystic Christian truth in many of those same sayings of the heathen poets and sages searching after light? What else is meant,

too, by the sweet psalmist of the Hebrew tongue when he speaks of Him who giveth his beloved sleep?"

But Willoughby was too anxious to get his comrade safe into the English lines to be willing to stand thus parleying and musing. And indeed there were others of the same opinion in that matter, and the Earl of Leicester himself, who had heard of his nephew's grievous hurt, was seen at that moment riding hastily out to meet them.

"O Philip," he cried in a sort of despair, as he saw his death-like face, "I am truly grieved to see thee in this plight."

Then good old Sir William Pelham, who knew well how it was that Sidney had suffered this injury, approached with tears in his eyes and fairly kissed the hand that was extended to him in friendly good-fellowship and comfort.

"O noble Sir Philip, never did man attain hurt so honourably or serve so valiantly as you! Your noble courage in the face of our enemies has won you a name of everlasting honour."

Returning gentle and courteous thanks to all for their good-will, Sidney was carried into his tent, where the surgeons were at once sent for to attend upon him. He himself, as all could see, had little expectation of surviving the hurt; yet he bore with unflinching fortitude the dressing of the wound and the setting of the shattered bone, after which he was conveyed in his uncle's barge to Arnheim, where better attendance was to be had than in the camp.

Lord Willoughby, the two Furnival brothers, and Vis-

count Lisle, the last of whom had received some slight hurt, were of the company who formed the mournful *cortége* which slowly proceeded up stream till the roofs and spires of Arnheim hove in sight. Sidney, lying on deck too faint and spent for words, looked about him with a sort of melancholy pleasure as the waning sunlight fell with picturesque beauty upon the high-pitched gables and thatched roofs of the outlying farms and the quaint old town. Those who watched him, albeit they were unwilling to admit as much themselves, said one to another in after days that they had seen death in his face then; and Willoughby sat apart with averted face and mournful mien, for he loved Sidney even as a brother, and hardened soldier as he was growing to be, he could not think of this fair young life thus thrown away without a desolating sense of sorrow.

But there was a pleasant surprise in store for him on the arrival of the barge at Arnheim: for there on the quay, with the two boys beside her, stood his young wife herself, and with her, a little in the background, was her uncle West, the portly and dignified merchant; and Willoughby, after one long incredulous stare, sprang ashore ere the boat had been well brought up, and had clasped his wife in his arms, without a thought for the spectators crowding down to welcome the heroes of the fight.

A light wherry had given notice of the approach of the barge, and in the same manner news of the morning's encounter had earlier reached the town. Willoughby understood all that, but he knew not how his wife had

been spirited hither, and this must be explained in a few words.

Left alone at Flushing, Ursula found that only the presence of her father and uncle rendered her life in any way endurable. When they spoke of leaving, it seemed impossible to her to remain alone in that foreign city. Her father would have gladly taken her back to England, but she could not bear to leave the land where her husband was fighting; and at length the sagacious merchant suggested that when Mr. Furnival and his younger daughter returned to England he should transport Ursula in his sloop to Arnheim, which would be certain to form a part of the winter quarters of the troops during the approaching season. Ursula had gladly caught at the suggestion, and it had forthwith been carried out. She was now installed in one of the best houses in the place, surrounded by all needful luxuries; and the moment that news had been brought of the grievous wound received by the gallant Sir Philip, she had ordered the best room in the house to be fitted up for his reception, together with means of easy transport to convey the sufferer to his destination.

"Ah, wife, thou art indeed a true help-meet," said Willoughby fondly, as she spoke to him in rapid undertones of what she had done; and Robert Sidney, who had likewise sprung ashore distracted by grief at the condition of his dearly-loved brother, seized her hand and kissed it in his gratitude at learning her kindly preparations for his ease and comfort.

So the little procession was quickly formed, and Sidney

was gently carried to the pleasant house where such thoughtful preparation had been made for him. Ursula's thankful joy at getting her dear lord back safe and sound from that dire fight, and seeing her two brothers also unhurt, could not but make light her heart, despite her sorrow at the fate which had befallen the gallant Sidney. After she had watched the procession start for the house, she gave one more glance round, and her eye fell upon Lisle, who had slowly disembarked, and was gazing wonderingly about him, as if uncertain what to do with himself, and his aspect told her at once that he had not escaped unscathed from that day's encounter.

"My Lord Lisle," she exclaimed, making a step forward and extending her hand, "this is well met indeed; and I pray you follow us home, and your hurt shall be looked to by our best surgeon. I had not heard that you would be here; but I am rejoiced to see you not more disabled.—Peregrine, wilt thou not give him the help of thy strong arm? for the way is something rough and steep, and he looketh but wan and feeble for the journey."

Willoughby did his wife's bidding with a smile, Lisle disclaiming the need for aid, and yet thankful for it when a few paces had been traversed. And thus the little procession of warriors reached the fair and quaint mansion which good Merchant West had seen duly prepared for his niece's reception, and where the weary travellers were received with every hospitable care and attention.

More surgeons were ready to give their services to the wounded Sidney, and for a few days he lingered on, sup-

posed to be doing well, and even reported convalescent in despatches forwarded to England, where the news was received with almost extravagant expressions of joy. All that womanly forethought could do to provide for his comfort was freely bestowed upon him by Lady Willoughby, who was one of those admitted daily to his presence to receive his sweet and gentle words of thanks, and listen to his poetic musings and the discourses which passed between him and his friends.

Count Hohenlo sent his own surgeon, a man of great skill, one Adrian van den Spiegel, especially to attend upon him; but he saw very soon that the case was hopeless, and Sidney had recognized this himself from the first.

The pain left him, and with a mind thus disengaged he gathered his friends about him and gave them little mementoes by which to remember him, speaking such brave and noble words as were cherished even more than the tokens from his hands.

And then he asked for music, and Lisle was sent for with his lute, which had lain dormant these many years, and indeed had scarce been touched since it had awoke sweet music for the Queen in the days when the youth had not exchanged his courtier's finery for the mailed dress of the soldier.

"Ah! the Nightingale," breathed Sidney with a faint smile, as the first notes of the sweet voice broke upon his ears; and as he recognized the words which were sung, a strange look of pleasure crossed his face, and he lay with closed eyes as if drinking in every sound.

It was a poem he had himself composed as he lay dying, which Lisle had set to music, and was now singing to him. It was called "*La Cuisse Rompue,*" and was a wild and strange song, rendered all the more impressive by the sweet and yet weird cadences of the air to which it had been set.

And every day, as the evening shades drew on, Sidney would rouse himself from the languor of exhaustion to ask for his "Nightingale" with his sweet song; and Lisle would be ready to answer the summons, and would sing to him till the dying daylight faded from the sky and the shades of night drew on.

And on one soft autumnal evening, as the last notes of music died into silence, Sidney suddenly raised himself and looked round upon those beside him with a gaze of exquisite gratitude and love. He had thanked them individually that day for all their good offices, and there were no words for them now, but he beckoned his brother to his side and whispered a few low-toned exhortations. In the deep silence of the chamber the first of these were distinctly audible: "Love my memory! Cherish my friends! Above all, govern thy will and affections by the will and word of thy Creator! In me beholding the end of this world with all her vanities!"

What more was spoken was too low for other ears to catch, and the last charge given, the soldier sank back with a little sigh. The gentle and heroic spirit had fled to the God who gave it.

CHAPTER XVIII.

OLD ENGLAND AGAIN.

"I WILL not believe it. There hath been some error in the name. It is not of my son that these tidings are told."

The speaker was the Earl of Courtland, and he was pacing in ill-concealed anxiety the stately apartment in which he and his daughter had received a visit at an early hour of the day from their neighbour Mr. Furnival. Alianora, with white cheeks and eyes full of distress and alarm, was looking full into the face of the visitor, who seemed to have been the bearer of heavy tidings, and whose aspect, covered with dust as he was, seemed to betoken that he had ridden over to the castle in some haste that morning.

"I trust, my lord," said he quietly, "that there may have been some error; yet I fear me we cannot doubt but that Lord Lisle is in somewhat sore plight. The man, who wore my Lord Willoughby's livery, came charged direct with a message from my daughter, and she begged that you might be informed, so that you might have a horse-litter in readiness at Southampton ere the vessel

puts into port, to carry your son home, as his state was most precarious. Wherefore I posted off in person to communicate the news to you, whilst at my house all needful preparations are being set forward for the meeting and reception of my daughter. There is so little breeze that the sloop may be some hours yet in making the harbour; but the boat she sent forward to land in advance hath been in this many hours, as the messenger hath had time to reach my house, and I have had time to come hither. So I beseech you, my lord, to lose no time in setting on foot such preparations as may be deemed needful; for I trow we should be at the harbour as soon after noon as may be, and with the roads deep in summer sand the journey will be something tedious."

"Ah, marry, your counsel is good, and shall be followed," said the Earl, suddenly changing his tone. "Nevertheless, I believe not half the fellow's tidings. The messenger hath been confused, and hath made the most of the matter that he may win the more heed. Yet I will go forthwith to see with mine own eyes the brave men who have been so gallantly risking their lives, and have been so foully served by those same States they have been manfully defending. May the devil bury those dastardly Provinces beneath the sea for ever!" cried the old nobleman, suddenly venting his emotion in a burst of fury not entirely uncalled for. "Here have we spent our gold and our lives in their service, and they lift not a hand to save their best cities from the spoiler's hand, and the flower of our youth is thrown away in vain. Is my son's life to be a sacrifice

to their intrigue and duplicity? Shame upon them and all their country, say I!"

The Earl flung himself from the room, and his voice was soon heard without, raised in imperative command; whilst Alianora turned with tearful eyes to Mr. Furnival (who seemed almost as a father to her) as she asked,—

"Is it indeed as he saith? Hath there been treachery? And hath Lisle's life been cast away for a shadow?"

"We will trust in God, sweet lady, and call not his life sacrificed as yet. He may live when he reaches his home and thy tender care. He hath been brought hither as his last chance—so I understand Ursula's messenger to say. And we must not speak or think too hardly of the States in this matter, albeit there seemeth to have been some slackness, akin to treachery, in their backwardness to relieve their own city. We shall judge more rightly when we hear the story from those who have been on the spot. Yet I fear from the return of my dear daughter, who must be sorely loath to leave her good lord, that there are troubles greater than before gathering round those struggling States. He would not have sent her from his side had he thought it safe for her to stay. But it boots not thus to stand wondering and discussing. We must away to the port to receive our travellers and bid them welcome home after their troubles and reverses."

Alianora looked up at him beseechingly, and laid her hand upon his arm, as if she were still beneath his control.

"I prithee take me with thee, sweet sir, that I may be the first to welcome my brother home. I will not let nor

trouble thee on the way. Only take me with thee; I shall fret my very heart out at home an I tarry there."

Mr. Furnival smiled fondly at her as he answered,—

"Take thee? Ay, marry will I, thy good father permitting it. But it is his leave thou must ask, my girl, for thou art under his roof now; yet I will be answerable for thy safety an he will give thee into my care."

"A thousand thanks, good mine uncle," cried Alianora, falling back unconsciously into the old phrase she had always used when she had been an inmate of his house; and with light steps she hastened off to ask leave of her father for her wished-for expedition, and was back again ere many minutes had fled.

"He hath consented, and my palfrey is being saddled already. Let me but don my riding-dress and I will be with thee in a twinkling. And the great state-coach my father purchased for the use of her Majesty when she was with us is being harnessed to eight of our stoutest steeds, to bring my brother home. The journey is long, and should his condition be precarious, he will be more commodiously lodged there than in a horse-litter, where he could scarce breathe this sultry weather. Good uncle, wilt thou go to the court-yard and see that they have all that is needed for the journey? I mislike these cumbersome coaches myself—I ever fear some mischance with them; but truly it may be, as my father saith, a more commodious manner of travelling, if so be my poor brother is sorely hurt and laid very low."

Alianora hastened away to don her riding-dress, and

to give orders to the servants as to the needful preparations for the viscount's reception. Heavy as had been the tidings as to his condition, it was not possible but to rejoice at the thought of his speedy return home. Alianora had missed him sorely during his long absence, and she had been in constant anxiety about him, since he had ever been in the thickest of the fighting, and had seemed almost to court danger and death. Ill and sore wounded as he was now, let him but once reach the doors of his own home, and she felt that she could assuredly cure him; and when once cured, hold him to her side, and keep him from again adventuring his life in those far-off lands of peril. Therefore there were gladness and hope in her heart, as well as anxious sorrow, and she rode bravely on beside her "uncle," eagerly looking forward to the moment which should give her back not her brother only, but her more than sister, Ursula Willoughby.

A few words of explanation must here be given as to the events of the past few months. After the battle of Zutphen, Leicester, greatly distressed by his nephew's death, and thoroughly out of love with his enterprise, which had been anything but successful, had retired to England for a time, to make his peace with Elizabeth and justify himself before her. His absence had been the signal for all manner of intrigues and jealousies, into which it is needless to enter here. Leicester had been neither wise nor successful either as a general or as a statesman, and Prince Maurice, who had gladly received him at first, had become disgusted with him, and with his royal mistress, whose

coquetting with Spain was perfectly well known in the States, and roused, as was but natural, immense distrust and disgust.

The patriot party began to despair of ever working harmoniously with England. National jealousies ran high. There were discord and distrust in council-chamber and field, and the States had some reason for their hostility. Stanley had betrayed them at Deventer, and had surrendered the city to the Spaniards by the blackest act of treachery, and York had given up another fortress in just the same way. When Sluys, therefore, was closely besieged, and the English garrison were imploring aid from the Netherlanders without, was it to be greatly wondered at that these were somewhat slack in responding to the call? To relieve the place was a risky and dangerous undertaking, and there were many that argued the inutility of the step. If it were saved from the Spaniards by force, it would next be delivered up by treachery—so at least many believed; and the jealousies which distracted the counsels of the nation hindered concerted action now. The gallant defence of the city excited admiration even in the breasts of the opposing Spaniards, and at the eleventh hour the Earl of Leicester himself set out to try and relieve it; but again his own bad generalship and the half-heartedness of his allies defeated the attempt, and the city capitulated to Parma, only stipulating that they should march out with all the honours of war. Otherwise the gallant little starving garrison, and no less heroic townfolk, were prepared to fire the city in a hundred places, and sally forth in one band to be cut to

pieces by the enemy, sooner than surrender on any but honourable terms.

Leicester, who had returned to his duties only a short time since, was very severely blamed for this loss in many quarters, although Lord Willoughby and others of his generals declared that the blame did not lie with him, but with the Dutch pilots, who, when the relief-party by water had been organized, flatly refused to do their duty, declaring the enterprise perfectly useless unless there were a land-force to co-operate with them. However that may be, the end was inevitable. The city surrendered, and amongst those who marched out—only that with him this was a figure of speech, as he was carried out in an almost dying state—was Viscount Lisle, who had been one of its most gallant defenders, and had received many honourable wounds in its defence. He had been brought by water to Flushing, where Lady Willoughby was again mainly residing; but her husband had come to the conclusion that for the present at least she would be better in her father's house in England.

The disturbed state of the country, and the jealousy growing up against the English, rendered him more anxious about her in his many and long absences than he had been before. He saw less and less prospect of the speedy peace hoped for at first, and his own duties kept him almost constantly away from her. His sons, now growing to be fine manly lads, were to remain with him, and take their chance in warfare; but he deemed it best to send home his wife to the little ones in England, at any rate until a better

understanding should have been established between his country and her allies.

And so it came about that the sloop which brought Ursula into the port of Southampton brought also Lord Lisle, and some few of the little band of Englishmen who had served him so gallantly and well. Alianora's brother was, of course, an object of tender care to Lady Willoughby, and it was attributed mainly to her good offices that the viscount had survived to reach his native shores. How it would fare with him then Ursula did not dare to say; she could only despatch a servant home to warn her relatives of their approach, and ask that all needful preparations should be made for the reception of the sufferer.

This bare outline of facts was all that was known by the Furnivals, as the father and mother, together with Alianora, stood upon the quay, watching the slow approach of the little vessel, as it was towed into harbour by smaller boats, in the dead calm of a still August afternoon.

Lord Beauchamp was also of the party, having heard a rumour that his friend Robert Sidney was likewise on board; and as the little vessel slowly drew to its anchorage, his was the first foot that sprang upon the deck, and his was the hand extended to Lady Willoughby to assist her to mount the slippery steps till she could reach the outstretched arms of her loving parents.

"My child, my child!" murmured the mother, pressing her closely in her arms; and there was something like a sob in Ursula's throat at sight of the dear familiar faces, and the sound of the homely English tongue spoken all around

her; but as she returned the embraces of those so dear to her, her eye still returned to the deck of the vessel she had but lately quitted, and meeting Alianora's anxious glance, she said,—

"Sweet sister, I have brought him back living to thee. God grant that he may yet be restored by thy tender care. Yet thou must prepare thyself to see him greatly changed. He hath been nigh at death's door these many weeks, and will need all thy loving tendance. Yes, he is there. Seest thou that pile of rugs in yon corner? There it is he lieth, for he cannot breathe the fouler air below, and hath been on deck by night and day since we set sail. He knoweth that he is at home though he looketh not to see thee. Go to him an thou wilt. It will be medicine to him to see thy loving face."

Mr. Furnival assisted Alianora to step on deck, and led her to the spot indicated. As they approached, a fine-looking young man rose up hastily from his seat beside the recumbent figure, and doffed a plumed hat—much the worse for wear—fixing his eyes upon Alianora with a gaze which expressed both admiration and pleasure.

"I crave pardon, fair lady," he said in the courteous tones of gentle breeding, "for thus addressing you; but methinks I must surely see in you the sister of my gallant friend who lies thus low before you. I have heard him speak of you many a time, and ere he was wasted to what you see now, his face so greatly resembled yours that I see not how I can be mistaken."

"I am indeed his sister," answered Alianora with

quivering lip. "I pray you, good sir, let me see my brother."

For the young man had stood for a moment before the prostrate figure, as if half afraid to let his sister approach. He looked at her now with pitiful eyes as she stepped forward and knelt beside the viscount, and in truth it was a sad sight which met her loving gaze.

Young Lord Lisle lay upon a rude bed of rugs and soldiers' mantles, fully dressed, in preparation for leaving the ship; but the very fact of his wearing his apparel, and possibly the exhaustion of having it put on, rendered his appearance even more death-like than it had been before. His face was wasted till it was nothing but skin and bone, and the marble whiteness extended even to the lips, which were absolutely bloodless. The features retained their delicate beauty, and the expression, as sweet and as pure as ever, had taken something of the noble loftiness so often seen upon the faces of the dead. The soft hair still clustered round the wide brow in golden tendrils, and the course of each blue vein could be distinctly traced. One hand lay outside the covering, and was as white and thin as the face, whilst the other was bandaged in a way that spoke of wounds still unhealed. Nor was that the only hurt, for the right leg was in splints, and they had heard before of a sword-thrust which had touched the lungs; and sudden hot tears rose to Alianora's eyes as she bent over him and whispered his name.

Suddenly the eyes flashed open—the soft lustrous eyes which had so great a likeness to her own, though now they

were unnaturally large and bright, burning in their hollow sockets. He gazed at Alianora as one awakening from a dream, and murmured in fondest accents,—

"Sister, sweetest sister! now indeed methinks I am at home."

"Oh, my brother, my brother," she almost sobbed, and her tears fell upon his brow as she bent to kiss him again and again, "I grieve to find thee thus! But it shall not be so long. I will take thee home, and I will make thee well."

He smiled—a shadow of his old sunny smile.

"Methinks, indeed, that I shall be well when I get home," he said. "All will be well then, I trow. How I have dreamed of the gardens where thou and I have played as infants together, and where, perchance, I may now lie, listening to the music of the birds and the plash of the falling water! Ah, how I have dreamed of it, and of thee, sweet sister, and have awakened to the sound of the guns, to the call to arms, to hunger and cold and the smart of wounds! Is it aught now but a sweet dream? Hold my hand, sister mine. Let me feel that thou art in very truth beside me."

She held his hand and pressed her lips upon it.

"Ah, my brother, thou hast suffered sorely. Oh, why didst thou ever go to these terrible wars?"

"Nay, Alianora, thou an Englishwoman and speakest so! I would not have sat idle whilst such glorious work was being done—not for all the riches of the Indies. When my strength lets me, I will tell thee more of it, and thou wilt wish that thou hadst been amongst that gallant

band of Amazons who themselves, and unaided by us, built an important redoubt betwixt citadel and rampart, which we ever called 'Fort Venus' in their honour. Thou must never regret that thy brother was there. And now, I prithee, thank this good comrade of mine, Sir Ralph Fortescue by name, who hath stood shoulder to shoulder with me in many a tough fight and desperate sally, and who hath twice dragged me back within our walls when I have fallen wounded without the lines. But for him thou wouldest have no brother left to-day. Wilt thou not bid him welcome to our fair home in token of what I owe to him?"

But as Alianora rose to her feet to do this, she found herself forestalled by her father, who, coming more slowly behind in the heavy coach, had even now arrived at the harbour, and had come up in time to hear the last words addressed to Alianora by his son.

As if afraid to be unmanned by a too close scrutiny of that much-changed face, the old peer turned first to the battered-looking knight, who bore the traces of many a weary day's campaigning both in his person and in his habiliments, and grasping him by the hand he begged him to accept the shelter of Courtland Castle, at least until he should have thoroughly recovered from his fatigues, and should have seen some great and favourable change in the condition of the comrade he had befriended so effectually and well.

And indeed the young soldier was grateful for the offer. His home was far away, and his purse was empty. He,

like every other gentleman in the service, had expended every penny in his possession in order to equip and feed the brave fellows fighting beside him; and Sir Ralph had carried his generosity so far that he had scarce more in the world to call his own than the weather-beaten garments he stood up in. It was very doubtful if the Queen in her present mood would do anything to recompense her faithful soldiers, and the Earl's hospitality was thus very welcome to the war-worn knight.

But the evening was drawing on, and although there was a full moon to light them upon their way, it seemed desirable to lose no time in conveying the wounded man to the cumbersome vehicle which was to transport him home. Ursula only waited to give one more embrace to Alianora, and bid her use every care in the transport of the patient, whose state required such tender handling, and who could ill bear the long journey which still lay before him, before she mounted the horse provided for her and rode away with her parents; and Alianora was left to her charge, the Earl being almost too much overcome to give any directions himself, only standing by helpless as a child, with a stricken look upon his face that was infinitely pathetic.

But Sir Ralph was the kindest and most invaluable of friends at such a time. He took upon himself the office of director, and under his care Lisle was safely transported to the great coach; and when laid down upon its soft cushions he breathed a sigh of relief, and even smiled in Alianora's troubled face, as he recognized the gorgeous equipage in which he found himself.

"Marry, the coach of her blessed Majesty! Methinks this is indeed royalty itself. Good Fortescue, what think you? We are e'en to travel in the Queen's carriage. What say you to that for poor soldiers, who have known what it hath been to make one day's rations serve half a week, and feel small hope of getting more at the week's end? Dost know thyself again? I am fain to think it all a fevered dream."

But Queen's carriage though it might be, poor Lisle was little in love with it as it jolted over mile after mile of rough sandy road. And though Alianora sat beside him supporting his head, and everything that love could devise for his relief was done, yet the pain of his wounds became so intense that he presently sank into a death-like swoon, from which no effort on the part of those about him could rouse him; and when, after many long hours, he was carried into the house and laid in the bed prepared for him, the leech, who had been long in waiting, shook his head, and whispered to Fortescue that they had but brought him home to die. Indeed for a time it seemed as if he would never open his eyes again to the home the memories of which had haunted him in many a long dream of feverish delirium.

But if this home-coming was sad, great was the rejoicing at the Manor-house when, shortly after moonrise, the little cavalcade drew up to the door, and Bess and Ursula were clasped in one another's arms.

"Oh, it is like a dream to see it all again—just the

same; every corner unchanged. I only miss the faces of the boys, and their gay clamour; but I must not murmur at that, since they have done so much to make it home for me across the water.—And my little ones, where are they? —Ah, and here in good time comes Barbara. Sweet cousin, thou art least changed of all. I could vow it was but yesterday that I last saw the gleam of thy merry black eyes. And thou hast been a sort of mother to the little ones in my absence, it is told me. How can I thank thee for what thou hast done?"

"Nay now, a playfellow and mischief-teacher would be the fittingest word," cried merry Barbara, whose laugh was never long in ringing out. "We needed, in faith, some faces more to fill all the blanks, and I trow we should have been but a melancholic party had it not been for the children here. And if thou hast come thinking to take them away, good Lady Willoughby, thou wilt get thyself into a mighty coil."

"Take them away?" echoed Ursula, looking round her, and then putting her arm about her mother's neck with a sigh that was almost a sob. "Nay, good Barbara, there is no such stuff in my thoughts. And didst thou know how good and sweet a thing it is once again to feel one's self beneath the roof of 'home,' after all the buffeting of these past years, thou wouldest talk no more of going away. Until my good lord can lay down his sword and make me a home at his side, I trust I may find one here in this sweet place, far from the strife of parties and the clash of arms; for oh, I am very weary, and I have been sick at

heart for the sight of home faces and the sound of the dear familiar tongue."

And Ursula, who had been much tried through the past months by the loneliness of her position and the anxieties of war, fairly broke down in weeping, and was taken upstairs by her mother, who would let her go through no more excitements that night, and denied her even a peep at the sleeping children until the next day.

"Marry, I marvel not to see her thus," said Bess; "I am right thankful to have her safe at home. I like not the thought of her out there alone. I trust it never may be my hap to be a soldier's wife."

"Nay now, how canst thou say thus?" cried Barbara with flashing eyes. "I would be a soldier myself—"

"That is a different matter," interpolated Bess with a quiet smile; but Barbara ran on unheeding,—

"I would the boys were home to tell us all the news. I hoped that Gilbert might have come, for said not some one that Mr. Robert Sidney was like to have been on board the vessel?"

Gilbert, who had been esquire to Sir Philip Sidney, had, since the death of that knight, attached himself to the person of his brother, so that the parents had had hopes of seeing him as well as Ursula. Barbara's eyes roved round as if in search of him, but Mr. Furnival answered the unspoken question in her eyes.

"Gilbert hath indeed landed, and is in the country, but not here. His lord and he took the shorter route, and are now in London; but he will be with us ere long.

Ursula came charged with a message to that effect. Mr. Sidney himself spoke of coming to see us shortly. He hath been greatly changed and aged by his brother's death, she telleth me, and is the man altogether now, whereas formerly he seemed something more youthful than his years. He is even now sent hither by his uncle Leicester on some business of moment. He may not stay long absent from the service in the States, but thy cousin said he had expressly spoken of coming hither to pay his respects, and to see her once again ere he sailed."

Barbara's eyes lighted suddenly, but she said nothing, and the hour was too late to admit of much lingering. The travellers were served with food, and then the silence of night fell upon the house, and Ursula, who had quickly fallen into the sleep of extreme fatigue, awoke betimes to the familiar sounds of the farm life about her, the twittering of the birds upon the eaves, and the soft golden radiance of a true English summer dawn.

Weary as she yet felt, there was something so sweet in all this that she could no longer remain in bed, and rising and dressing herself, she wandered out into the fresh dewy brightness of the familiar place, and the first person to meet and greet her was none other than her cousin Constance West, of whose very presence in the house she was until then unaware.

The embrace between them was warm and heartfelt, for they loved each other dearly, and Ursula gazing into the pale fair face of the girl, asked what had come to her to change her, for there was something of sadness in the

delicate features and the glance of the trustful eyes, and to one who had not seen her for a considerable space of time it was evident that she had grown more thin and fragile than had been her wont in times past.

"Nay, I am not ill. I have never kept my bed for a day. Yet my father is ever looking at me with anxious eyes, telling me that I lack flesh or colour or appetite—I wot not what else beside," answered Constance with a smile. "And each summer as it cometh he will not rest until he bringeth me hither, for he says I never looked so blooming as the first summer we spent together here. I am well pleased to be in this sweet place, and I delight in the love of Bess and thy mother; but there is nought amiss with me for all they say. And, O Ursula" (breaking suddenly off and beginning a new subject with bewildering impetuosity), "talking of illness makes me think of him—my young Lord Lisle. Tell me of him and how he bore the journey. I would I might have stayed up last night to welcome thee and ask news. But they treat me like one who needs watching and cosseting, and I was sent to bed ere it was nigh upon time for thee to arrive. Thou didst not think me indifferent?"

"Nay, sweet cousin, and indeed I knew not of thy presence here, for there was so much to hear and to tell as we rode homeward that I had not been told the half ere the gate was reached. Touching our Alianora's brother, I greatly fear he may not live. He is sore hurt, and hath gone through so much privation in that terrible siege as must have weakened him almost beyond the power of

recovery. True, he looketh somewhat less like death than when they brought him to Flushing, and he hath that cheerful bravery of spirit that helpeth recovery more than any doctor's skill. But I am afraid to hope, although I have seen many marvellous cures. But, dearest cousin, I fear me thou art more ill than thou hast said. Thy face is as pale as thy ruff, and methinks thy hands are trembling too."

But Constance flushed as rosy red as she had been pale before, and disclaimed any indisposition.

"I am but sore grieved for that gentle Lady Alianora, who seemeth so wrapped up in him. I have seen her many times since I have been here, and methinks she hath had trouble enow without this new one. It hath been whispered to me that she and thy brother Humphrey have loved each other from childhood. O Ursula, Ursula, I have never seen thee since that dread news was brought touching Humphrey, but I have shed many bitter tears for him and for thee."

"I doubt it not, dear cousin," answered Ursula, heaving a heavy sigh. "It scarce bears thinking of. And yet there are times when I can think of naught else. I yet hold to some lingering hope that Ivo may bring home tidings of him. Thou knowest that he sailed with our bold sea-king not many months ago, and hath helped in his attempts at the destruction of that armament which men say is coming soon to subjugate this nation. He is with our uncle Gammage, and his ship hath not yet returned. I trow well what keeps them back; and albeit I

fear to let myself hope, there are moments when my heart tells me that we shall see our dear one again. My lord says that hundreds and thousands of prisoners will be told off for galley service for this same armament; and methinks if Humphrey but gets sight of the coast of old England, the fetters are yet unforged that would serve to hold him back from us;" and Ursula's eyes flashed and her colour deepened as the tears of deeply-stirred feeling sprang to her eyes.

"I know, I know," cried Constance; "my aunt hath spoken like words before now. I trow that she begins to hope, though she will not admit as much even to herself. And she looketh anxiously for tidings of Ivo. She fears the sea, as well she may, and methinks would hardly have let Ivo go had it not been thy husband's doing, Ursula; but she thinketh much of my Lord Willoughby's sagacity and forethought."

"Ay, truly, I feared it might be added pain for her; but thou knowest that Sir Francis Drake visited the Provinces last autumn, and my husband saw much of him, and, together with other patriots of both nations, they discussed this project, which already he had in his head, and Ivo took fire at thought of carrying warfare into the enemy's own quarters, and was wild to be one of them that should sail. And my good lord would not hold him back; nay, he urged him to take that course. Thou knowest that these wretched dissensions, which have brought to nought our best schemes for ridding the States of the common foe, were even then commencing. Disappointment

and discouragement were before us, and my lord said that were he not bound in honour to the cause to which he had pledged himself, he would fain go himself to the sea, where there would be no distracted counsels, no half-hearted traitors, no spies, and no renegades in the ranks; but where every man would fight his best against the tyrant, and where there would be absolute obedience to absolute authority, such as Drake demands and obtains wherever he goes and whatever he does. And so, not able to go himself, he was glad to send Ivo, who was sorely weary of inaction and the sense of double-dealing and treachery by which we were surrounded. And he went full of hope to learn somewhat of Humphrey's fate. And every day we think of him, and wonder if he may not come, bringing— But no, we must not hope too much; and yet more wondrous deliverances have been wrought ere now, and Ivo would dare all and risk all if Humphrey's life were in the balance."

It was much indeed to be able to cherish one ray of hope regarding that absent one whose name was seldom mentioned now, and about whose fate such terrible mystery hung; and Ursula and her mother whispered together some of the vague glimmering fancies which were lightening in a measure the gloom of the past and the future.

It was such peace to Ursula to be once more in the calm atmosphere of the old home, with the children she loved and called her own clinging round her knees, and her mother's hand in hers as they sat together in the shady orchard, both idle for once, enjoying the sense of tranquillity and

calm which can never be so thoroughly valued as when it has been withdrawn from us a while. Although separated from her lord, Ursula had seen so little of him during the troublous events of the past months that she had grown used to the blank of his absence, and had schooled herself to accept it, as soldiers' wives are bound to do when duty demands that their husbands shall be in camp and field with their men, in lieu of the pleasanter quarters of their own homes. And in his absence how good it was to be "at home!" She could not help saying so as her eyes wandered round the still sweet place, and finally returned to the face either of the mother or one of the little ones beside her.

Anxiety for the viscount and Alianora were the only disturbing elements marring the perfect content of the day; and upon the following forenoon Ursula, by that time entirely recovered from the fatigues of the journey, rode over with her father to the castle to obtain the latest report of Lord Lisle.

They met with gloomy answers from the servants, who plainly thought their young master had come home only to die; but the guests were ushered into the castle, and ere they had waited many minutes Alianora came gliding in, pale as a ghost, with heavy rings round her eyes as if she had not slept all night; and when she saw Ursula she flung herself into her arms, not weeping—it was not her manner—but drawing long breaths as if her grief lay too deep for the relief of tears, though the convulsive sobs seemed to tear her delicate frame to pieces. Mr. Furnival

withdrew to the anteroom, leaving the girl to his daughter's care; and Alianora, feeling the comfort of the warm embrace in which she was held, gradually grew calm, and let Ursula draw her to a couch, upon which they seated themselves together; and Lady Willoughby, still holding her close, asked softly,—

"Tell me all, dearest sister. Is it true that you have given up hope of his life?"

"I know not—I cannot tell. They will not say all hope is over, and yet each time I look upon his dear face I am well-nigh choked by my tears; there is that in it which breaketh my heart to see. Methinks if they would but leave him alone, my care and tendance might do somewhat for him; but they put him to such grievous pain, searching after the bullet in his foot, and then he falls into such death-like swooning that I think he never will open his eyes to this world more, and almost hope he may not if it be to suffer such torment. O Ursula, I would I had thy mother's skill. When I think how she and our Honora cured Lord Beauchamp long years ago, and would not let the leeches come anigh him with their horrid knives and lancets, I long to have their skill and their authority; but my father believes in these tormentors, and they say it is the only chance. And Lisle smiles and bids them do what they will with him, and bears everything without a murmur. And yet methinks he cares not to live. I fain would see him something different. He lies so tranquil when he is left in peace, and gazes out of the window, or into my face, with a look which I know not

how to brook. I feel that this is not the brother I knew in the years now past. And yet he is tenfold dearer to me. And if I lose him too, methinks my heart will break."

Again came that tearless sobbing, which Ursula set herself to check. She knew well that some change had passed upon the bright young viscount during the period spent by him in the hardships of a soldier's career, and she had seen something of that same absence of clinging to life which was grieving Alianora now. In one with a future of ease and wealth and distinction before him, this indifference was not easily understood; and there was something in the personality of Lord Lisle which won all hearts, and roused a strong interest and affection in the breasts of all who came into contact with him. Ursula felt almost as if it were her own brother thus shadowed by the wings of the death-angel, and she held Alianora's hand very closely in hers as she murmured words of sisterly love and consolation.

But Alianora could not linger even with Ursula.

"I must needs go back to him. I cannot bear him out of my sight long. I feel that any moment he may close his eyes and slip away. Wilt thou not come with me, Ursula, and see what thou thinkest of him thyself? thou hast seen so much of sickness and wounds. Thou mightest be able to comfort me. And he will rejoice to see thee. When he hath strength for words he speaketh much of thy gentle tendance on the homeward way."

Ursula willingly followed Alianora up the wide staircase

and into a magnificent bedchamber—the same which had been furnished anew, regardless of cost, for the reception of the Queen some six years before. It was, indeed, two large rooms knocked into one, and the great windows opened upon a wide alcove or balcony, which was itself like a smaller and equally luxurious chamber. In this sultry weather the size of these windows (all of which stood wide open to let in the air), and the noble proportions of the room, were an immense boon to the patient, who lay, not in the huge canopied bed, but upon a much smaller and narrower one drawn near to the window. He was propped up by down pillows in a way which showed that his respiration was somewhat affected, and a servant stood swinging a large door gently to and fro in order to create a current of air through the room.

Lisle lay back on his pillows in an attitude that spoke the extreme of exhaustion, and he had more the appearance of an alabaster image than of a living creature of flesh and blood. His comrade, Sir Ralph Fortescue, sat beside him with a book upon his knee; and his sudden movement at sight of the ladies caused the viscount to open his eyes. He recognized Ursula in a moment, and greeted her with one of those bright smiles which gave him a passing resemblance to his former self; but he attempted no speech, and Ursula saw the light of fever in the bright, soft eyes, and her heart sank within her. She took his hand and bent over him, and said some kind and soothing words; but she saw that he had no power to reply save by a smile, and it was only too plain that he had lost ground

since his arrival, and that it would be little short of a miracle if he could live.

She would not stay—she was afraid of seeing too much, and of having to answer Alianora's questions afterwards; but as she joined her father, and the two rode homewards slowly in the summer heat, she said in stifled accents,—

"O my poor Alianora, it seemeth as if she is doomed to lose all those she best loveth;" and seeing her father turn upon her a look of surprised inquiry, she could not forbear to add, "Know you not, sweet sir, that her heart was long ago given to our Humphrey; that none hath mourned his fate like Alianora? And now it seemeth as if her brother is to be taken away, and she will be left desolate indeed."

CHAPTER XIX.

LOVE THE CONQUEROR.

"MY son, my son, is there naught that I can do for thee?" cried the Earl, in sudden and bitter anguish of spirit; "hast thou no wish ungratified? Is there nothing in this world that thou longest for? Tell me an there be, so will I move mountains themselves to compass it. Give me but somewhat to do for thy sake; I cannot bear to hear thee ever say that thou desirest nothing."

Lisle opened his weary eyes with a shadow of his old smile, and for a moment fastened them upon his father's face.

"Did I ever say that, father?"

The words were scarce a whisper, and the long fringed eyes closed almost ere the lips ceased to move, as though some leaden weight pressed them down. Lisle still lay upon the narrow bed beside the window, where Ursula had seen him a week ago; but the week had been one of steady retrogression, and now as he lay he seemed more dead than alive, and unless directly addressed, seldom appeared to heed what went on about him, or even to know who was with him, so long as his sister was there at his side.

The surgeons had worked their stern will upon him. The bullet had been found and extracted; and when fever had ensued, he had been bled again and again, until his very life seemed to be drained away. Then having put him to intolerable pain, and reduced him to this state in order to cure him, they said that nature was failing, and that their skill could do no more. The patient's constitution had been so weakened by privation and sickness during the hard campaigning which had gone before, that there was no power to rally from the severity of more recent injuries.

And this verdict had to-day been finally given; listened to by Alianora with the calmness of previous certainty, but by the Earl with a sense of fierce rebellion and indignation. He felt that he had been cozened and deceived. He had nerved himself to see his son suffer grievously, because he was told that therein lay the only hope; and now that his days had been made a misery to himself, and that the constant pain had brought him to the very lowest ebb of exhaustion—to the very gates of the grave—the surgeons coolly told the father that no more could be done, and he, in the passion of his sorrow and resentment, had spoken words which had caused the said worthies to stiffen their backs and declare it impossible ever to enter the house again.

Perhaps no one regretted this decision, and Alianora only wished that it had been made a week ago. She had been haunted all the while by the feeling that if only they would let her brother alone, rest and care and nourishing

food might save him ; but her father trusted to the supposed skill of the medical authorities, and would not listen to her, and only when it was too late did he rave against the men, whom he considered to have wilfully deceived him.

It was in the anguish of his spirit that he made this appeal to Lisle, and when the faint words of reply were repeated by Alianora, who had learned to understand him by a species of intuition, he gave a start of surprise, and said,—

"Thou hast never asked for aught. Speak, my son ; I will do thy lightest word, though it should cost me all that I possess. What have I to live for if thou art taken from me ?"

Lisle once again opened his eyes, and made a faint movement as if to take Alianora's hand in his.

"Thou hast a daughter left to love and cherish," he said faintly ; and signed to her to give him some of the strong cordial, which when swallowed gave him momentary strength.

"And thy request ?" cried the father, bending down towards him, a ray of eagerness crossing the mournful gravity of his face. He felt that he must do something for this beloved son before he died, and that the very expression of a wish would show he had not yet fully relaxed his grasp on life. There had been something almost unearthly in the calm, tranquil resignation and submission which had characterized Lisle throughout. He had seemed to be hardly chained to earth at all, as if the fetters of life had been loosened and cast off, and

he himself was only awaiting the summons to leave them and depart.

As his father thus spoke, a strange look crept into the languid eyes, which with difficulty opened even to the dim light of the sick-chamber. He made an effort and spoke with more distinctness, though still in a low whisper.

"I would I might see Mistress Constance West again," he said; "methinks she would come to me—now. It is but to say a long adieu."

The Earl, to whom the name was altogether new (for if he had ever heard it he had forgotten it), looked at Alianora for an explanation which Lisle was manifestly unfit to give; and in a moment a veil seemed to fall from the girl's eyes, whilst a hundred little trifling incidents thronged her mind, never heeded till then, but all pointing to the same conclusion. She saw it all in a moment now, and her deep, keen sympathy gave her a new insight into her brother's character. Had not they both been suffering under a like fate? And how little she had guessed how it had been with him!

"Who is this lady?" asked the Earl in low tones.

"Marry, none other than the cousin of Lady Willoughby," said Alianora, putting her case with innocent diplomacy—"a lovely and amply dowered maiden, as sweet as she is beautiful, albeit she is but the only child of a rich and loyal merchant of the city of London."

Had she been the bare-foot daughter of one of his own hinds the Earl would have cared little at this moment. He had room in his head but for one idea, and that was to do

everything in his power to soothe the last hours of his dearly-loved son, and let him not know an ungratified wish.

"London," he said, and a thrill of disappointment crossed his face. "It will be a matter then of two days at very least ere she can come."

"Nay, but, dear sir, she is nigher at hand than that. She is even now on a visit to our good friends the Furnivals. She is but five miles from our own doors."

"Now Heaven be praised!" said the Earl devoutly. "I will fetch her hence myself without more delay.—My son, take courage. The lady is not far off. I will bring her to thy side ere this day be three hours older."

A strange gleam crossed the marble-white face of the young man, and as his father hastened away, only bent on fulfilling his son's wish speedily, Lisle's eyes sought Alianora's, and as she bent her head to his lips he murmured,—

"I have loved none but her, and she loveth me. She never would have wed me had I lived; she thought it ill to mate 'unequally,' as she phrased it. But methinks she will come to me now. And if I may not live for her, to die with her hand in mine will be more than I have dared to hope for."

It was not all spoken at once, but bit by bit, as he found strength; whilst Alianora dropped tender kisses on his brow, and marvelled less at what had troubled her before, knowing now that he had resigned the thought which makes life sweet to most men of his age. If he had no hopes of wedding where he loved, was it strange that he should be so willing to die? She caressed and soothed him with

tender whispered words, and sat musing and wondering how all would end.

Meantime the Earl spared not his riding for the heat of the summer afternoon, and shortly before five o'clock he reined in his foam-flecked steed before the door of the Manor-house. Mr. Furnival chanced to be at his own threshold, and came hastily out, marvelling at the apparition, and fearing that there must be bad news, though it seemed strange that Lord Courtland should have brought it in person.

"Good my lord, what can I do for you?" he questioned. "I pray you dismount, and let your horse be tended somewhat—"

"Nay, I thank you, good sir, but my business brooks not delay. Let me to the point without parley. Methinks you have beneath this roof a fair young kinswoman, by name Mistress Constance West?"

"Ay, verily," answered Mr. Furnival, more and more perplexed.

"It is with her I fain would speak, an it please you thus far to favour me. I have words for her ear, yet if you will with all speed bring her to me, you shall hear all I have to say."

Feeling that there was something in this beyond his power to unravel, and seeing in the haggard face of the Earl that which forbade him to dally or delay, the good squire stepped back into the hall for a moment, and reappeared holding Constance by the hand, his wife following with a look of surprise upon her gentle face.

The Earl dismounted in a second, and, hat in hand, approached the trembling girl, whose beauty and grace, together with the wistful, sorrowful expression in her eyes, impressed themselves favourably upon his brain, even whilst he seemed to have no thought for aught but the urgency of the matter in hand.

"Gracious lady," he said in rapid accents, which were yet courtly and polished, "I crave your pardon for thus intruding upon you, but the cause in hand brooks not delay. You have doubtless heard of the dangerous illness of mine only son?" Constance bent her head, and the quiver which passed across her features, and the sudden pallor that overspread her face, told a tale of its own to the quickened faculties of the grief-stricken father, who continued the more earnestly and appealingly. "This day the surgeons have told me that they can do no more for him. He is past their skill, and must surely die. Sweet Mistress Constance, thy look telleth me that thou art not indifferent to his state. A bare hour ago I begged him to tell me if aught in this world could give him peace or comfort, and he whispered thy name, and asked if he might not see thy face again. I questioned no more—in sooth he hath no strength to answer questions—but I came in person as fast as horse could bring me to pray that thou wouldest thus favour his dying wish and come to him. I know not what hath passed between you; I know only that he craveth to see thy face. Wilt thou come with me and let him look on thee again?"

"My lord, I will," answered Constance, without a

moment's hesitation; and looking straight into his eyes she went on, gathering courage as she spoke, and letting every word be distinctly heard by those who stood by—namely, her uncle and aunt and cousins, all of whom had gathered round them—"Good my lord, I will tell you all. Your noble son, whom I had had the honour and the delight to know somewhat more nearly than our rank in life warranted, owing to the presence in our poor house of my cousin, now Lady Willoughby, and ever your lady daughter's friend and almost sister—my Lord Lisle, I say, came oft to our house, and I will not deny, for I am not ashamed to say it, that I thought I had never in all my life seen so gallant, so true-hearted, and so knightly a gentleman. And one day, to my great astonishment—it was shortly before he went to the wars—he came to me and asked my hand in wedlock; but I, my lord, albeit I may not deny that my heart gave but too ready assent to his words—I said I must not wed him, and that he must think no more of me. He was a noble knight and peer of the realm, and I but a merchant's daughter. I bade him think of his allegiance to you, even as I must think of my obedience to my good father. And so we parted, knowing it could never be; and I have tried to hope that he would forget, and wed where he might find a lady worthy in all ways of him."

Bravely as she had spoken all this while, she paused and faltered now; and Lord Courtland, who had been regarding her with glances of surprise, approval, and admiration, now broke eagerly in,—

"But thou hast not forgotten him, I trow, sweet lady,

and thou wilt respond to this dying wish, and come now to his bedside?"

Constance looked straight at the speaker with a glance as lofty as if the blood of a hundred earls ran in her veins.

"Were your noble son about to recover of this sickness, I would not let myself approach him, for I know well that he ought to forget me, and that I should be but a stumbling-block in his way; but if he be dying, I will e'en go to him, for I cannot hurt him thus, and I shall have the memory of his love to live on until God in His goodness calls me also to the land where partings cannot come."

As she spoke she turned swiftly, and vanished into the house, to reappear in a marvellously short space in the white cloth riding dress, with silver trappings, her father had provided for her, which seemed to set off the fairness of her skin and the deep lustre of her eyes, which were shining now like stars on a winter's night.

During her absence there had been some rapid discussion between her relatives.

"Thou must go with her, good wife," said Mr. Furnival; "and methinks I must send an express to London to acquaint her father of this strange chance. The maid hath been marvellous discreet and true-hearted, and if the young lord lies dying and asking for her, common humanity will not let us keep her away; but her father must know, and that right soon. I would he might come down himself to see my lord the Earl. I trow he will lose no time when he hears what hath befallen.

"I would fain see him myself," said Lord Courtland.

"The name of Master West is well known in London. He hath done excellent good service for her Majesty ere now. I have e'en heard her say it herself.—And, good madam, I would indeed crave your presence beneath my roof, if I might make bold to do so. Have we not heard of thy skill with the sick, times and enow? and my poor son hath suffered so sorely at the hands of the leeches that I have turned them away, and will have no more of them. If you could do aught to ease his pain and bring some refreshment to him, I would bless the very ground you stand on. My Alianora's song all these days hath ever been, 'If only my sweet aunt were here!' and marry I wish I had sent those same surgeons about their business days ago, and solicited thy kindly care. At least he need not have been so cruelly handled, and maybe thou wouldest not have bled him nigh to death as they have done."

Mrs. Furnival needed no farther entreaty, and hurried away to prepare for her ride. Horses were saddled, and medicaments and healing herbs put together with alacrity; and though Constance rode away with the Earl before her aunt was ready, the latter followed quickly behind. And there was confidence in many hearts that possibly her attendance upon the patient might lead to something beyond a transitory good. Whilst there is life there is always hope, and youth is very tenacious of life.

Constance would fain have been silent on the strange, rapid journey to the castle, so overcome was she by what had happened, and so moved by the thought of what lay before her; but the Earl, who was anxious to know every

detail of the friendship so strangely established between his son and the merchant's daughter, plied her with questions which she was forced to answer, and presently she found herself pouring out the whole story with surprising freedom. The father's heart was too full of his dying son to have any room for minor considerations as to rank, and there was something so fair and winning and refined in Constance's whole aspect and conversation, that he was fain to forget she was aught save the woman his son loved, and a right noble-hearted girl to boot. Her gentle dignity and modesty, which mingled so well with her simple frankness, could not but commend itself to the man of the world. He marvelled little at Lisle's choice, but freely owned to himself that had there been no inequality of rank the viscount could not have done better, whilst many men had wed much lower whose marriages had yet turned out far from unhappily.

As the sun declined and they reached the shady avenues which led to the castle, they pushed on at a more rapid pace; and Constance's heart beat almost to suffocation as they stopped at length at the massive entrance, and she felt herself lifted from the saddle and led upstairs by the impatient Earl, who was fearful even now that he might have come too late.

But no change had taken place in the patient's state. Lisle lay as before, save that his eyes were open now, and that when he saw his father's companion a great light leaped into them, giving to his whole face such a strange radiance and beauty, that the Earl turned aside as if un-

able to bear the sight, and Constance moved across the great room alone, and knelt silently down beside him.

"You have come," he said in his low whisper.

"Yes, my lord, I have come," she answered, and placed her hands in his; and so they remained a long while, looking into each other's faces without the wish, as it seemed, to speak. Presently his eyes closed softly, and the feeble hands relaxed their clasp; and when Alianora looked again she saw that the sorely-needed sleep had come—the sleep which might have saved him had he but been able to obtain it earlier.

Something in his face told Constance how much needed it was, and she kept her station beside him, never moving a muscle, but still holding his nerveless hands in a light clasp; and thus the long hours sped away, and she felt not fatigue or stiffness in the joy at being with him again, even though the hours left them might be few. And Alianora, hovering about the darkening room like a ministering spirit, could not but whisper to her father,—

"Oh, my lord, I trow she will save him yet. He hath never known such rest all these weary days and nights. She acteth like a charm upon him. Oh, would she had been here before!"

"We cannot let her go now," answered the Earl in the same tone. "I have never seen so marvellous a change pass over any one before. See, his face is full of rest, as it hath never been, even when he hath dropped off into the fitful slumber we have tried to call quiet sleep. There are none of those tossings and startings nor of those visions which

keep real rest away. I fear me she must be sorely weary, yet I dare not bid her move."

And Constance would in vain have been so bidden. She would have knelt thus all night had it been needful; but presently Lisle heaved a little sigh, and opened his eyes as if regretfully, only to see with a start of surprise the glimmering white figure beside him, with its crown of golden hair.

"Thou art not gone, sweet Constance," he murmured. "Methought it was a sweet dream, and I feared to let myself wake."

"It is no dream, my dear lord," said Constance gently. "The Earl, your good father, brought me here, and mine aunt hath since come to bear me company."

"Thou needst not go then? Marry that is good hearing. I will try to find word of thanks anon for this gracious favour bestowed on me; but I am something dazed to-night, and I have small power of speech."

And indeed the feverish pain which always came at night was upon him already, and he signed to Alianora to take Constance away, that she might not see him suffer. His wounds always began to ache and throb at this time of the evening, and gave him a long night of misery and exhaustion, from which he had scarce strength to rally till the next attack was upon him.

But unexpected succour was at hand to-day. As Constance quitted the room, Mrs. Furnival entered it. She had been questioning the servants and the Earl himself, and had learned as much as they could tell her of the nature of

the injuries from which Lisle was suffering, so that she had made her preparations accordingly.

The patient, worn out with excitement and the hectic fever which no blood-letting had sufficed to allay, scarce knew who or what had come to him; but gradually he was aware that some beneficent presence was at work, for his aching wounds were unbound with gentle fingers, and instead of the handling he had been wont to receive, which had set every nerve quivering with anguish, he was conscious only of coolness and comfort, a gradual cessation of the weary throbbing, and a delicious drowsy languor stealing away his senses, till he fell once again into that dreamless sleep which was to him the most blessed thing of all.

"Nay, verily, madam, methinks thou art a witch," quoth Sir Ralph to Mrs. Furnival, as he watched the lines smoothing themselves away from the white face, and the restful pose which told of refreshing slumber. The knight had been wont to take much of the night-watch by the sick-bed of his friend. They had grown greatly attached during the months of hardship and captivity spent together, and now it was natural to Lisle to turn to his old comrade when most worn with pain and weariness. Fortescue seldom left him, save during the daylight hours, when his sister was ever at his side. "I have been with him almost every night since first he received those hurts, and never have I seen him sink to sleep after this fashion. These hours of late have been so full of suffering that it hath grieved me to the heart to see it. And it seemeth like

magic to watch him beneath thy hands. I would I knew thy secret."

"It is a very simple one," answered Mrs. Furnival, smiling. "It is no magic beyond that of helping nature, in place of hindering her at her beneficent work. There are many herbs to be found around us whose properties are wondrous potent in allaying pain and inducing sleep. I have but applied a posset of these to that poor foot, which hath been well-nigh cut to pieces by yon surgeons, whom my lord the Earl saith he hath dismissed from farther attendance. Instead of letting blood to keep down fever, I have been wont to give a simple draught, which we prepare ourselves from these same herbs, and which seldom fails to bring sleep—nature's own sovereign remedy. I pretend to no skill save what has been learned by many years of watching the sick, and learning what experience teaches. I speak not, as some do, against the leeches, who in their zeal ofttimes seem cruel to their patients. They do their best, and accomplish what we cannot. Yet methinks there are times when, their work being accomplished, we can better tend the sufferer than they; and this may now be the case with Lord Lisle, who, as I take it, is in more need now of woman's patient watching and tendance than of surgeon's skill."

"I fear me he will not long need either the one or the other," answered Fortescue with a sigh, "and yet hadst thou seen him earlier—"

Mrs. Furnival smiled and shook her head.

"I am no worker of miracles," she said softly, "and long

privation and hardship had doubtless undermined his health before these wounds were received. But at least, if it be not in our power to save him, I trust we may do much to lighten the suffering, and make the passage more easy for him."

And indeed it seemed as if this would be so. Lisle awoke the next morning, after several quiet refreshing spells of sleep, to see the face of Constance beside him. And lying still and looking at her, without much wish or power of speech, seemed to fill him with a restful content that acted like a charm; and when the Earl stole in and out, as was his wont, to look upon his son and see with his own eyes that he was wanting nothing, the serene and peaceful expression upon that face was so reassuring that he would steal away with a new hope and gladness at heart, asking himself if indeed this life might not yet be given back to him.

But Constance could not always be with her lover, and in her absence he would grow restless and sometimes feverish. At first it had been enough to know that she was beneath the same roof, and to see her beside him when he opened his eyes to the light of another day; but when used to that he seemed (as was but natural) to crave more. His sleep at night became broken and troubled. He would awake calling out for her, and when he saw her not he would fancy that all was a delusive dream, and those about him had much ado to convince and quiet him. Mrs. Furnival's merciful rule did very much for him; but his strength had been so drained away, his

fine constitution so impaired by all he had gone through, that it seemed impossible for him to rally. And not one of those about him dared to speak of improvement, when the lamp of life burned so low in the socket that it seemed as if a breath might extinguish the flickering flame.

His father was greatly distressed by this lack of rallying power, even when rest and relief were so much more frequent. The patient was troubled, too, by a relapse into wakefulness at nights, and the fear that Constance's presence was a delusion of his brain. The Earl was almost as restless and troubled as his son, and his happiest hours were those which he spent pacing the gardens with Constance beside him, talking to her and hearing her talk on the everlasting subject—of which neither wearied—of his son, and learning in a fashion, unheeded at the time, how utterly and entirely the maiden had given her heart away.

Once, stealing noiselessly into the sick-room, as he often did, to see that all was well, he chanced to hear a low-toned talk between his son and Constance, from which, albeit a man of honour, he was unable to tear himself away, though he knew that in the gathering dusk his presence was not known.

Constance and Lisle were alone together, which was not usual, as Alianora was generally of the party; but to-day she had ridden over to the Manor-house, under the escort of her aunt and Sir Ralph, and so the viscount had been left to the care of Constance, who had sat beside him whilst he slept, and it was but now that he had awakened to see her fair face shining upon him through the gathering gloom.

"Constance," he said, in the half-bewildered way that bespoke the weakness of his faculties, "art thou there, sweetheart?"

"Ay, my lord, I am beside thee. Thou hast enjoyed a refreshing sleep, which I trust hath done thee good."

"I am ever well when thou art with me," he answered, feebly putting out his hand for hers. "Constance, tell me it is no dream, but that thou hast truly come to me. Didst thou not say once that it might never be thus betwixt us?"

"I did say so, dear my lord," was her answer, as she pressed his wasted hands between hers. "But I am beside thee now because I can do thee no harm; and thy father hath bid me come."

"Ay, sweetheart, I trow I read thy meaning. Thou wouldest not take me in life, but, true woman that thou art, thou comest to me in death, that I may die with thy hand in mine, and that thy sweet face may be the last upon which mine eyes may rest."

There was the sound of a little sob in the duskiness of the room; and then Lisle said faintly,—

"Nay, thou must not weep, my heart's treasure. Thinkest thou that it is hard to go—and to go thus? I have looked too many times on death to fear him now; and if life would but mean separation from thee, I would fain choose death, an the choice were mine."

"Ah, say not so, good my lord," she faltered. "How can I live when thou art gone?"

"We shall meet again, my Constance—we shall meet in

a land where will be no harsh barriers to stand betwixt us and that love which methinks God Himself must have put in our hearts, it is so strong, so pure, so holy a thing. The weary are at rest there, they say, and thou canst scarce know or understand how sorely I crave that same rest. Methinks I could have been strong to live for thee, sweet Constance, might that have been; but if it may not be, 'tis sweeter to die with thee beside me than to wake to a life which thou mayest not share. A few years more, and thou wilt join me on that far shore, and there will be no pain and no parting thereafter."

The Earl heard no more. Already he felt as if he had listened too long. He silently withdrew, and paced the dark avenue backwards and forwards in uncontrollable restlessness. At supper that same evening he sat so silent and absorbed that Alianora feared her brother was worse. He only spoke once, and then it was to ask if aught had been heard at the Manor-house of the merchant West.

"He arrived there this very day," said Alianora; and somewhat to her surprise, her father gave orders to a servant to ride over immediately after dawn the following day with an urgent request to the merchant to come at once to the castle.

Alianora was next day walking in the gardens, gathering flowers for the sick-room, when she observed the approach of Mr. West, and saw her father walk hastily forward to greet him ere he had fairly arrived at the entrance gate. Instead of taking him to the house, the Earl led him by a side door into the inner garden, upon

the upper terrace of which the girl herself stood watching them; and there they commenced pacing to and fro along a shady garden walk beneath a lofty wall, so deep in converse that they appeared lost to all outward impressions, and never raised their eyes to the spot where she was standing looking down upon them.

Not a word could Alianora catch of all that was said; but it was plain from the gestures of the two men that her father was urging upon the merchant some plan to which he appeared to give decided opposition at the first, and only after very long and close argument on the part of his companion did he appear to show signs of yielding. This in itself seemed somewhat strange, and Alianora wondered what might be the matter at issue. But she believed her father in the end had won his point, and she left them deep in converse of a quieter kind, when she sped back to the sick-room with her fragrant load of flowers.

Constance was there before her, sitting where Lisle loved to see her—in a place where the light fell upon her from the shaded window, and full in his view when he opened his eyes. She was pale and pensive that morning, and he looked terribly frail and transparent, with the dark shadows beneath his eyes which told of wakeful hours, and in his pose that air of utter exhaustion which was always a sign of retrogression. The small excitement of his talk with Constance last evening had reacted upon him in an almost sleepless night; and now he had only a faint smile of welcome for Alianora before his tired eyes closed again, and the little ray of hope she had un-

consciously been cherishing for a few days past seemed to be extinguished in the old sorrowful misgiving.

She glanced at Sir Ralph, who sat in a window embrasure with a book (she had learned of late to turn to him for confirmation of her hopes or fears where her brother was concerned), and he answered by a little shake of the head.

"I greatly fear he is weaker this morning. I know not why. The power of sleep seems going from him. He scarce rests now unless Mistress Constance be with him, and her absence at night brings the feverish fears and fancies which drive sleep away. But he hath grown tranquil since she came to him. I trust he may gather strength with the advancing hours of the day."

At that moment the door opened, and the Earl and the merchant advanced together. Both faces wore a look of purpose which struck Alianora as boding something new. Constance rose, and advanced quickly towards her father. The room was so spacious that the meeting did not disturb Lisle, who was too feeble to heed what passed around him, and was not able to see from where he lay who it was that had come.

But the Earl did not leave father and daughter much space for their greetings. His mind was full of some thought of his own; and to the unspeakable astonishment of the merchant's daughter, he had next moment possessed himself of her hand and had bent his knee before her.

"Sweet Mistress Constance," he said, in a voice which quivered with emotion, "I come to you as a humble

suppliant for a boon which thou, and thou only, canst confer."

"Oh, my lord," cried Constance, distressed and abashed, "speak not so, I pray you, and kneel not to me. It must be well known to you that I would gladly do whatsoever you may ask of me, in token of thanks for the grace you have shown in thus permitting me—"

But her voice faltered and broke, and she could only turn her eyes towards the bed whereon the viscount lay.

"Ay, it is of him I would speak," said the Earl, in accents which betrayed almost as much emotion as Constance's had done. "Sweet lady, thou hast already told me that thou lovest my son, as he indeed loveth thee. And the boon I pray of thee is that thou wilt wed him now—this very day if may be, if not upon the morrow—and give him by so doing the only chance of life which now remains to him. Nay, start not, fair maiden, nor look so timidly at thy father. He hath given his gracious consent that it may be so if thou wilt have it; and truly, I believe that thou couldest save him were he truly thy spouse, and had he thee to live for—his own loyal and wedded wife. Did I think that thou wouldest be made a wife only to wear the widow's coif in a few short weeks, I would not ask it of thee. But there is that in my heart which tells me that thou couldest save him for us yet, wouldest thou but take him as he is, and tend him as only a wife may do, he knowing that in life or death nothing may come betwixt ye twain. Gentle lady, hast thou no compassion for a sorrowing, despairing father; for a brave

young life which may yet be saved, I trow, by thee? I know thou hast. I know thou wilt hear me. I see by thy face that thou art melting now."

In truth, there were so many conflicting feelings struggling for mastery in the girl's breast that she could scarce command her voice to answer. But the fatherly clasp of the merchant's hand upon her shoulder, and a few murmured words in her ear, seemed to give her a new courage and confidence; and looking fearlessly at the Earl, she asked a question of him.

"My lord, and if I do as you desire—I will not deny that it is the greatest happiness which may be offered to me—and let us suppose that this precious life be given back to us: might there not in the future come a day when you would say in your heart that the Viscount Lisle was ill-mated with the merchant's daughter? Might it not even seem to you, perchance, that it had been better to risk all than to have mated him thus unequally with one who may be sneered at and flouted for her lowly birth, who may hinder her lord's advancement in life, and be like a clog around his neck when he would fain rise to the place to which his noble birth and gallant deeds entitle him? I fear not for *his* loyalty and love—they have been tried by long waiting, and have remained firm and true" (the girl's eyes sparkled proudly, and her face was illuminated by a wonderful smile as she glanced once more in the direction of the viscount); "but you, my lord—what of you? Can you answer for yourself in years to come that you will not repent the deed you wish done this day?"

"Bravely spoken, in all sooth," murmured Sir Ralph beneath his breath to Alianora, who with him was watching eagerly this little scene. "Methinks the maid would grace right well the royalest palace in the land, were it her fate to rule there."

As for the Earl, he made no direct response; but taking Constance by the hand, he led her to the bedside of his son.

Lisle had by this time become aroused to the consciousness that something of an unusual nature was going on beside him. His ear was acutely alive to any sound of Constance's voice, and low as her words had been spoken, emotion had given to them a penetrating quality which had aroused the attention of her lover. He had not caught the sense of them, but his eyes were opened with a glance of wondering inquiry, which deepened as he saw the merchant in the room. What was the meaning of it all? The momentary flash of hope which awoke within him brought a passing flush to his cheek and a brightness to his eye which gave him something of a look of health. His gaze travelled from one to the other, finally fixing itself on his father's face.

"Thou hast something to tell me, father," he said.

"Ay, my son, I have; and methinks my tidings will do thee good. This sweet maiden, who erst refused thy suit for reasons which are known to thee hath been graciously pleased to listen to my humble pleading, and with the consent of my very good friend her father, hath promised to wed thee, not when thou shalt be healed of thy wounds,

but now—this very day, as thou liest there—that she may tend thee and nurse thee back to health with her own fair hands. And it hath pleased her to say that living or dying she would rather be thine own; wherefore, my son, I bring thee here thy betrothed wife, to be made thy wife, in very sooth, as soon as the rite may be said."

A wonderful light leaped into Lisle's eyes; yet he seemed hardly able to believe what he heard. His glance sought Constance's down-bent face, which was covered with blushes and quivering with emotion.

"Sweetheart, is it so indeed?" he asked; and as she knelt suddenly down beside him, and pressed kisses on his hands, as if no words were possible to her, he drew her towards him with more strength than they had believed to be in him, and whispered,—

"Yet, dearest, if it be only to leave thee widowed?" whereupon she found voice to whisper,—

"And if that must be, will it not be still sweet to bear thy name, and to have won the right to mourn thee all my days? And oh, my love, my love, I pray Heaven I may yet nurse thee back to health! God is very merciful, and His ears are ever open to our prayers."

"And happiness is the sweetest and most potent of medicines," added the viscount softly. "O my Constance —my love—my bride!"

The Earl retired then, and motioned to the rest to follow him from the room. His eyes were alight with hope and joy, and as he reached the corridor he turned once more and grasped the merchant by the hands.

"I trow she will save him yet. The lad will live for her sweet sake.—My daughter, thou too must thank this worthy friend for the boon he hath done to us. It is ill for a father to give so sweet a daughter to one who seemeth like a dying man—to one who must needs for long months, or even years to come, need rather a nurse than a wife. Yet he hath done this thing in answer to our prayers; and if it all go as I trust and believe, we shall owe thy brother's life to his goodness, for the maiden would never have said yea had not her father given his willing consent and blessing."

So Alianora, with tears in her eyes, put her hands within the clasp of the kind-hearted and worthy merchant, and received from him such a kiss as might have been bestowed upon his own child. At that moment the touch of nature which makes the whole world kin had obliterated all thought of varying rank, and had made the peer and the merchant as brothers and friends.

CHAPTER XX.

SUNSHINE AFTER RAIN.

THERE was a pleasant walk in the garden of Honora's peaceful home, which terminated in a great yew arbour, that even on the hottest day was cool and pleasant. Although August was waning, the weather was still very sultry, and young Sir Robert Sidney, who had lately arrived from a hot and dusty journey, was tempted by the coolness of the yew walk to forsake the sunny brilliance of the garden. Some matter of business had called his host away, and Honora had withdrawn to carry her little masterful son to his nurse. Sidney followed with his eyes the retreating graceful figure of the fair young mother, and something of a sigh escaped his lips.

"These soft pleasures are not for us soldiers," he said half aloud. "Perchance my noble brother was right and wise in what he said when he counselled me to think not of the strife of parties or the clash of arms, but give myself rather to a life of study and seclusion. I will not say I repent me of the choice, yet I had no thought when I followed in his footsteps of losing him so soon—the noblest, gentlest, most chivalrous soul that ever breathed. Life hath never looked the same to me since he hath been taken

away; and when one gazes upon such a fair, peaceful home as this, there are moments when one cannot but wish the lines of one's life had been cast in some such spot. With treachery in the council-room, and cowardice and desertion on the battle-field, it is hard sometimes not to say with the wise man, 'Vanity, vanity; all is vanity.' And yet it is in truth a noble life, or should be, were we but able to conquer these wretched jealousies, and act promptly and in concord. And the day is coming fast when the eyes of the blindest will be opened, and the Queen will then repent the parsimony and vacillation which have kept the foe so near to her own doors, when he might have been swept across the frontier months and years ago."

Sidney thus mused half aloud as he paced up this shady walk, and his face was grave for his years, and had lost much of that boyishness of contour which had given him the look of youthfulness and elasticity that had been his marked characteristic in days gone by. Soldier-life, hardship, and sorrow had changed him from a boy to a man; and the honour of knighthood, recently conferred upon him for his gallantry of conduct and loyalty to his cause, seemed in no way incongruous to his appearance or bearing. He had not quite the grace or beauty of his elder brother, and yet there was a strong likeness between them, and the likeness was one which deepened with years. There had been those at Court who had started with surprise when Robert had lately come among them, so striking was the similarity in pose and bearing between this young knight and the brother so deservedly renowned.

His mission was now over, and he was shortly to return to his uncle of Leicester in the States; but he had been long absent from England and his friends there, and had promised himself a couple of weeks' relaxation in some quiet home before he returned to the strife and intrigue of parties on foreign soil. His thoughts not unnaturally turned in the direction of his friend Lord Beauchamp, whose romantic and happy marriage had now ceased to be talked of as a recent event. He desired to see for himself the happiness he had heard of with satisfaction; and so, when his business permitted him, he turned his back on the Court, and rode by rapid stages to the pleasant south-country home he knew so well.

As Sir Robert was walking along the path towards the yew arbour at the end, his attention was attracted by the sound of weeping proceeding from that same spot. There was such an abandonment in it that he fancied it must proceed from some child in trouble; and possessing one of those kindly hearts that never could pass by distress without trying to allay it, he walked on, and became aware of a small crouching figure in the corner of the arbour, shaking with the vehemence of a fit of sobbing which seemed as if it would tear the delicate frame in pieces.

"A little maid," he said to himself with a compassionate smile, as he stood hesitating upon the threshold, hardly knowing whether to advance or retire. "She seemeth something too old to cry her eyes out over a broken toy, and too young for a more serious trouble to be breaking her heart. Can she be a guest here? Her clothes seem

to be of fine workmanship. Methinks I will speak to her, and ask if I may serve her. It were a cruel thing to pass by unmoved at the sight of so much sorrow."

And raising his voice so as to attract her attention even in the midst of her sobs, the young man spoke again,—

"Fair maiden, I grieve to see you thus in trouble. Are you suffering any manner of hurt from which—"

But Sidney stopped short as suddenly as he had begun; for the weeping lady faced suddenly round at sound of his voice, and he saw that though small and slight it was no child he addressed, nor yet a stranger; for in the tear-stained lineaments and red-rimmed black eyes he recognized those of his former teasing mistress and playfellow, Barbara Gammage.

The recognition was mutual, and Barbara sprang to her feet, gazing at him as if he were a ghost.

"They—they—said that you had finished your mission, and were already away to Holland," she faltered forth, devouring him with her eyes as if fascinated. "How came you here, good Sir Robert? Why, it was told me not six hours ago, by my Lord Beauchamp himself, that he had received despatches from you saying that business obliged you to repair instantly to your uncle, and that we might not see you here. The messenger came but this morning, and I chanced to be staying beneath this roof when he arrived."

"Nay, that is good hearing; and I trust you will remain the while my leisure permits me so to do," answered Sidney, advancing and taking her hand. "It is true that

I had written as you say; but scarce had the messenger departed with the letter, when her blessed Majesty changed her mind as to the despatch I was to carry in such haste to mine uncle. Wherefore I followed hard behind my servant, and trusted to have over-ridden him and arrived first; but he was something too quick for me, and the heat hindered my journey. Wherefore it is but a couple of short hours since I arrived here; and I trusted to have news of thee in these parts, seeing I missed thy presence from about the person of her Majesty."

"Ay, truly, I have not been to Court this many a long day," answered Barbara, furtively drying her eyes and blinking away her tears, while the brightness of her smile seemed breaking through the clouds like a ray of April sunshine. Barbara was an impulsive being who did everything with her whole heart. If she cried, it was in no ambiguous fashion, but with the abandonment of childhood, and in the same manner a ray of comfort soon dried her tears and made her once more her saucy self. Perhaps she was somewhat ashamed of being thus caught by that old Court friend of hers (with whom so many a gay quip and crank had been exchanged) in such floods of tears; at any rate, there was a blush upon the face which turned itself towards him. "I am needed at home by my good aunt, since we have been so reduced a household. And methinks one wearies soon of the same gay round at Court, when once one has lost the sense that all the glitter is gold. I was glad to get the Queen's permission to return home with my good father, and to stay there likewise. I

had grown so tired of the glare and the glitter, the jealousies and the intrigues, and all those whom I cared for had gone to the wars—or elsewhere."

Barbara pulled herself up short with a glowing face, and Sidney smiled and came one step nearer.

"Tell me, sweet Mistress Barbara," he said, attempting to take her hand; whilst she drew back with a quick, almost petulant movement, rather as if she were again the saucy Barbara of two years ago. "Nay, look not so fiercely on me—it was but an innocent little question I was about to ask; but an you frown so on me, I think it were best not to venture it."

She looked up at him from beneath her black brows, and then heaving a deep sigh, let the mournful look sweep once more over her face.

"Thou art grown so like thy noble brother," she said, "I should scarce have known thee so soon but for that. Thou shouldest have been here to see how the nation mourned him when he died. It was as if each one of us had lost a friend and brother."

A sudden softness came into the soldier's eyes, and there was that in his look which heightened his resemblance to his brother, and made Barbara fancy for a moment that Sir Philip himself was before her.

"Didst thou mourn as for a brother, sweet Mistress Barbara?" he asked very gently, this time succeeding in capturing one of her hands, which he continued to hold in his. "I have heard with a sad pride of the tribute rendered to my gallant brother's memory. That pride would take a

note of gladness dared I think that thou hadst wept for him as a sister."

The girl drooped her head, and answered not. The tears were too near her eyes just now for her to be able to meet such a look without betraying some of her emotion. He could not look into her eyes, but he saw the quiver of her lips, and drew one pace nearer to her.

"Methinks you are in trouble to-day," he said very gently. "It was the sound of weeping that brought me hither first. In old days we used to be friends, and we have confided secrets to each other ere now. Will you not tell me what the trouble is? Is it not one that I may share?"

Barbara lifted her face towards him, and her lips drooped at the corners like those of a child in trouble. There was always something in that look which appealed to those who saw it. Sidney's eyes lighted, and his face was full of repressed eagerness.

"Perchance I am childish and foolish," she answered, with another of those deep sighs; "but there are moments when everything seemeth so sad—the world all out of joint, and every one full of care and sadness and sorrow. And then I needs must weep—it eases my heart of some of its heavy load; but why should I trouble you with these things, which are no concern of yours? I trow each family and household hath its own dark days and spells of sorrow; and if we are e'en passing through some such storm, why should others care?"

"If thou art in the tempest, I would fain be the one to

draw thee back into thy native sunshine," said Sidney gently; but then, as if afraid he had spoken too plainly, he added somewhat hastily, "But what is this same trouble, fair mistress? I have been here but a short while, and we have had much to talk of. I had heard of no such trouble as seemeth to cause thy weeping. May I not know what it is? An old friend claimeth that privilege."

"Methinks it is everything alike," said Barbara, who was apt to be comprehensive both in her woes and her joys. "Know you not that my father's ship is home again, and Ivo hath come back, but he bringeth no tidings of Humphrey? And now that he hath failed, we all know how much we expected good news, and it is like reopening all the old wounds again. And our Ursula's little son hardly drew three breaths ere he died, and our mother's hair hath turned so silver white that it goeth to my heart to see her. And to-day I did make shift to go and visit our Alianora at the castle, to see if I might not comfort her in her sorrow; for" (speaking hastily and in some slight confusion) "she hath ever looked on Ursula as a sister, and Humphrey—"

There she stopped short, and Sidney gave her a keen glance, whilst a slight smile crossed his face.

"I know that the Lady Alianora was brought up by your aunt. She will doubtless feel keenly any sorrow which cometh to them. But she hath cause for rejoicing, or so they tell me, in the matter of her gallant brother's recovery. Is it not true that he will now be healed of his grievous hurts?"

"Nay, I know not. In truth they say so. And this very day I went to the castle, hoping to get some comfort there; for all other places, save this home, seem full of trouble and sorrow. But Alianora was so sad at heart through the news which Ivo hath brought—or rather hath not brought—that we could but weep together till we could weep no more. And then she spoke of her brother, and asked if I would not see him, since he is able now to speak a few words with such as come to him. You have heard, doubtless, how he hath wed our cousin, who was erst known as Constance West, and that it is to her care and tendance that he owes the progress he hath already made? I was glad enough to see with mine own eyes something to cheer me after all the gloom and sorrow. And yet, when I came near him and heard him bid me welcome, I did but weep the more bitterly; for methinks I have never seen any creature so sorely changed, and I cannot believe but that he too will die, like all the rest whom one loveth best."

And Barbara's kerchief was at her eyes, and she had much ado to restrain another burst of tears.

Sidney's smile was full of kindliness and sympathy.

"Ah, Mistress Barbara," he said, "hadst thou been in the wars and seen the sights we soldiers learn to look upon unmoved, thou wouldest not be thus overcome even by what thou hast seen of Lord Lisle's sad state. I myself have seen such marvellous recoveries, that I have ceased to give up hope ere the coffin-lid closes and the corpse is borne to the grave. In truth, when I saw Lord

Lisle a few weeks back, it seemed as if he could scarce reach home alive: but since he hath done this, and hath even gained some small vantage-ground, I will rather credit what Lady Beauchamp tells me than mingle my tears with thine. For is she not reputed as only second in skill with the sick to your gracious aunt? and are they not both agreed that he is past the worst of the sickness now?"

Barbara wiped away the last of her tears, and looked up with something between a smile and a sigh.

"Ay, truly, I know that they say so: and Honora is more learned in these matters than I, and she hath gone almost daily to the castle since my aunt hath been tied by Ursula's side. But when I saw him with mine own eyes, looking, to my thinking, like one of those frail alabaster lamps in which a light is burning, and when I looked from him to his wife, and saw what parting must mean to them—for methinks never was love like theirs seen before—I felt my heart swell nigh to bursting, and I knew not for whom I must weep the more, the living or the lost. Ah, it is a sad, sad world we live in! and yet methinks I have never understood as much till now."

"It is in very truth a world of shadow and sunshine mixed," answered Sidney with a thoughtful smile. He seated himself upon the rustic seat on which Barbara had sunk, and placed himself very close beside her, still studying that changeful face with his watchful blue eyes. "There are times when the shadow is passing over us, and then all the world looks dark and gray; but the sunshine

is yet behind the cloud, and when it shines out again we see that we are not in such a black world after all. Methinks by what hath been said to me that Lady Lisle hath no bitter in her cup. Lady Beauchamp told me that never had she seen a bride so blooming and so happy."

Barbara made a sign of assent.

"I wot that it is so," she said. "I scarce knew her when we met, she was so full of that strange, sweet happiness which yet seemed to me unspeakably sad. They say that even if he dies she will never rue the day that made her his. But I think for my part, were I to lose my all almost ere I could call it mine, I would rather never have tasted happiness than be thus bereft so soon."

"And yet, think you not," questioned Sidney gently, "that there is one kind of happiness which never can be taken from us—something that becomes our very own not for time alone, but for eternity?"

She gave him one quick, startled glance, and then a burning blush mantled her cheek, and her eyelids drooped again.

"Is there not something, Barbara," he continued, "which so sweetens this life for those who may call it their own, that there can be no real shadow cast upon their path? Is there not a magic spirit which turns sorrow to joy, pain to pleasure, heaviness of heart to blithesome happiness; which sweetens toil, lightens labour, and brings with it peace, and rest, and comfort? I have heard of such wondrous alchemy, and seen somewhat of its magic. I have had my dreams of it likewise, wondering if it would ever enter into mine own life and cast its golden radiance

over all that is dark and dreary there. Dost thou know the name of the sprite who works such marvels over the fate of us poor mortals? Methinks that men call him by the little name of Love."

Barbara's head was bent low, but when she felt the warm clasp of strong fingers upon her own, she made no resistance, but let her hands be imprisoned, whilst she herself was drawn closer and closer towards the gallant soldier, of whom she had ofttimes thought, though she had not dared, even in her fondest dreams, to call him by the name of lover.

"Barbara," he said, and his voice sounded in her ears like the sweetest note of music, "there have been times when I have said to myself that a soldier ought never to wed, forasmuch as he is bound to follow the call of duty, and may be forced to leave his wife for many a weary day or year, and never perchance return to her side. It was easy so to speak when the heart was free and the fancy untrammelled, the clash of swords sweeter than the music of any soft voice, and the sword the only bride the soldier needed at his side. Yes, Barbara, I have tried to think thus; I have tried to forget a certain pair of bright black eyes that have looked into mine so oft that methinks they have stolen my heart away. I have been in danger, and in scenes of dread and death; and I have, notwithstanding, never been able to attain to this oblivion. And sometimes when bullets have been flying thick about me, and I have seen men falling on every side, and wondered if my own turn might not be the next,

I have said in my heart, with a strange sense of regret, 'And she will never know I loved her; I have never held her to my heart or told her of my love.' And it seemed then as if it would be a sadder thing to die with the secret untold than to speak it, even if death must needs part thee and me afterwards."

"Oh, it would, it would!" cried impulsive Barbara, who was quivering in every nerve as the sense of his words penetrated to her understanding; and the next moment she felt herself drawn into his arms, and was sobbing (though in a very different fashion, for her tears were now those of the purest happiness) her very heart out upon his manly breast. The wondrous alchemy of which he had spoken but a moment since seemed already at work; the things which had before appeared gloomy and sad were now flooded by a golden brightness, and life itself was transformed.

"And so you are not afraid of the lot of a soldier's wife, my Barbara?" he questioned tenderly; "you are not daunted by what you have seen of its perils and hardships?"

"They can be no hardships which are shared with you," cried the girl with brightening eyes. "And as for the peril, marry I will share that too, and rejoice and be proud to do as other women have done before me. O Robert, if thou only knewest how I have yearned to take some share in the glorious enterprise in which thou art engaged! If thou knewest how I have envied other women who have left all to follow their husbands into

foreign lands, to be with them in the hour of strife and danger! Methinks the blood of my fierce Welsh ancestors runs in my veins, for I can never feel that the spindle and the distaff are enough for me. I pant to see life and to share its glories and its perils. When I hear others say that the lot of a soldier's wife is hard, I feel that they know not what they say. Nay, do not smile and tell me it is I that know not. Can anything in the whole world be hard, so as I know thou lovest me, and I belong to thee? And who shall say me nay when I would follow thee to the world's end? Shall I not have the right?"

Her flashing eyes and impulsive words bore witness to the earnestness of her purpose. Sidney bent once more to kiss her; but his face, though full of pride and tenderness, was somewhat grave as well.

"Sweet Barbara, thy words give me life and joy and comfort. When I go back to a world of crafty intrigue, which is tenfold harder to live in than that nobler world of peril and strife of which thou speakest, I shall go back a happy man, strong in the knowledge of the love I have won. And thou wilt wait in patience till I can return to thee and wed thee; for with all thy courage and heroic spirit, I may not take thee yet into that land whither my steps are bent. It is not the fighting I dread, but the insidious jealousy of those who are called our friends, but who are but too often foes in disguise. I say not that the fault is not on our side also. Her Majesty hath given cause for doubt and distrust. Yet methinks they have behaved but scurvily on their part; and I, as so nearly

related to my good uncle of Leicester, am bound to the party which is most plotted against and most exposed to peril. Therefore I must bid thee, sweetheart, be patient for a while. But I will come for thee anon; and meantime, will it not be enough to know that our hearts are one?"

Barbara tried to think it would, and repressed the momentary feeling of disappointment at not being at once permitted to throw in her lot with the lover to whom her heart was pledged. She would fain have wedded him in as great haste as Honora had wed her lord, when he, too, purposed to go to the wars; but she saw that this must not be, and surely it was enough happiness for the present to know herself beloved. And as she sat with her hand in his, listening to the story of his love, and how she had subjugated his heart from the very first days when they had met at Court, she felt that the world had grown wondrous bright about her, and marvelled that it had ever seemed a sad or a lonely place.

Some of her old saucy spirit returned in time, and there was some light banter between the lovers, as he reminded her of her vow to keep the maiden state so long as her royal mistress did; but she replied with arch coquetry that she was not now nigher being wed than her Majesty had been many a time before. But there was that in her eyes which belied her words, and young Sidney did but hold her prisoner in his arms and make her retract her saucy speeches one by one, and own to him that she had found her master at last.

So long were the lovers absent from the house that Honora came at length to seek them; yet something in their look, as they paced the dusky walk together, seemed to tell her their secret, and she would have retreated with noiseless steps, had not Sidney seen the flutter of her dress and spoken out aloud.

"I fear we are truants to the board, good mine hostess," he said, glancing at the western sky, which told him how the day had advanced since he had sought the shelter of that cool spot. "But, in truth, I found this lady in such sore trouble here as no knight might pass by and leave her uncomforted. I pray thee look at her and tell me if I have succeeded in bringing back the smiles. But thou couldest judge better of my magic hadst thou seen her an hour since."

Barbara dashed suddenly past them both and scudded to the house like a hunted hare, whilst Honora looked with her calm, sweet smile into Sidney's face and said,—

"Methinks Barbara hath wrought as great a change in thee as thou in her, good Sir Robert. It is but now that my husband and I said one to another how greatly what thou hast been through has changed thee; yet as I see thy face now it is like the face I knew in years gone by, before the hand of sorrow had touched thee, or thou hadst known trouble and care."

Sidney smiled and threw back his head with a gesture of proud happiness akin to triumph.

"I verily can believe it," he said. "It seemeth to me that I have grown years younger since I came hither but

a few short hours ago. A man who within a year hath lost his father, his brother, and many a trusty comrade and friend, has need to look changed and to feel aged by his sorrow; but when he findeth one true and tender heart which beats for him alone, and wins the right to love and cherish the one being in the world most dear to him, then indeed the sorrow fades away into the distance, and he is young again in his happiness and his pride of possession. You and your husband, sweet Lady Beauchamp, know what I would say too well to make more words needful."

Honora held out her hand, and the soldier grasped it in his.

"I wish you every joy," she said simply. "Barbara hath been my very dear sister ever since I can well remember. I know her heart as few may do, and I know that you have won for yourself one of the warmest that ever beat."

"I am certain that it is so," he answered, smiling fondly, as together they passed across the threshold.

Barbara's happiness, if she had not long to indulge it, was intense in its brightness. Sidney's visit could not be extended beyond the two short weeks his uncle had allowed him. His duties in the Netherlands called him urgently back at the end of that time, but he had good hopes of returning the following year to make Barbara his wife; and if, as seemed probable, the peril of England from the common foe should arouse the Queen to a real and warm-hearted alliance with the Provinces, many of the worst difficulties and trials which still beset English

subjects on foreign soil would be gone, and he might either retire to dwell in England again, or take his wife with him and settle her in some safe place across the water, where he could have constant and easy access to her.

Meantime, as the weeks sped by apace, there was a gradually awakening sense of happiness and certainty in the minds of Alianora and her father as to the ultimate restoration to health of one they both held so dear.

The viscount still lay in a somewhat critical condition, but since the day of his strange and sudden marriage there had been no return of the worst symptoms. The fever had abated to trouble him no more, and little by little such a measure of strength was gained as seemed to promise a full return, when there should have been time to shake off the dire effects of long exposure, privation, and desperate wounds.

From the moment when he knew Constance to be his, bound to him by the holy and irrevocable tie which naught but death could sever,—from that moment the desire for life returned to Lord Lisle, and together with it such a meed of happiness and content as is the best tonic the world possesses.

He would lie for hours looking at his wife, listening to the sound of her soft voice as she read to him out of some of the favourite books from which he had been sundered during his years of hard campaigning. He marked with a fond pride the deepening bloom upon her cheek, the soft, radiant light in her eyes; and when the merchant, upon his frequent visits, would tell him that he had never

seen his girl so happy or so full of health in all her life before, the eyes of the young husband would light with pleasure, and he would murmur anew some words of the gratitude he ever felt for the gift which had been so generously bestowed upon him.

"I will repay it all, an I may live to do so," he would say with deepest earnestness. The merchant was wont to tell him that he had done that already; and despite the fact that he had lost an only child from his lonely home, and had yielded up some of the most cherished opinions and prejudices of a lifetime, he could not repent the step he had taken or wish the gift recalled.

As for the Earl, nothing in his eyes was good enough for Constance, and there was something almost pathetic in the devotion he bestowed upon his son's wife. When she left her husband's side to take the needful air and exercise prescribed by her aunt's advice and Lisle's wishes, Lord Courtland was ever on the watch to be her companion and attendant. They would pace the garden walks together, or ride side by side over the soft turf of the park, and their talk was ever of him they both loved so well; and each day seemed to draw more closely the bonds which made them as father and daughter. Small wonder was it that the merchant went home to his London house well satisfied that his child would meet with no slight at the hands of him whom he had regarded hitherto as one of the proudest men of the day. Lord Courtland would have been ready to challenge and slay with his own hands any person who would dare to show the smallest disrespect to

or breathe a single word of disparagement against, the fair Lady Lisle. He valued her for her own worth, and for what she had done for his son, and her birth was a matter of no moment to him. He grew to love her with his whole heart, and love knows no inequalities of rank.

But Alianora, despite her joy in Lisle's restoration, in which she now began to believe, and in the happiness of his presence and that of her "dear sister," as she often termed Constance, seemed nevertheless to droop and pine, and grow more ethereally lovely and fragile with each month as it passed by. Her brother often studied her with the insight of a true and deep affection, and once he spoke to his wife of the thought in his heart.

"Her life is so very lonely," he said. "She is not one who will be happy in a crowd. She needeth one to love and cherish her, one to whom her whole heart may be given. And methinks it hath been a sad thing that she hath so early yielded up her heart to him who for so long hath been worse than dead to her. I have hoped against hope these many years, but I cannot believe he will ever be seen again; and yet it is a passing sad thing that our sweet Alianora should waste her whole life in thus mourning for one who will never be hers in this world. Think you she will ever forget?"

"Nay, I know not. I love thy sister as if she were mine own; but I have not grown up with her, and I know naught of the secrets of her heart. Her talk is ever of thee when we are alone together; of Humphrey she speaks no word. Sometimes I have thought that she

hath been more wan and sad since the day that good Sir Ralph left us. I would it might be no fantasy of mine, for if ever there were love in man's looks it was in those he cast upon her. But of her I can tell less. She loved him for all he had been to thee; yet I know not if other thought than that were in her heart anent him."

The viscount lay looking thoughtfully before him.

"I would it might be—I would indeed that it were," he said. "We may know more some day, for Fortescue will be with us anon. An he cometh not before, he will make shift at least to spend the Christmas season with us here. He said as much himself ere he went away; and he is a man of his word, and will surely come."

CHAPTER XXI.

ALIANORA'S SUITOR.

"THEY come, they come! I hear the sledge-bells tinkling and the stamping of the horse-hoofs in the snow. I must needs go forth to meet them. Nay, stay me not, sweet mother; the cold never harmeth me."

Barbara's cheeks were in a glow, her black eyes were sparkling and flashing with joyous excitement. A little stir and eager bustle had been aroused in the great hall by her words; but she waited not to see what others would do, only pausing to fling a light covering over her head ere she opened the door, and slipped like a sprite into the frosty world of whiteness without.

It was the last day of the old year, and the snow lay thick and still over the face of nature. In the south it was one of the heaviest falls on record, and the hard frost which had succeeded had chained the rivers, and isolated within their walls all who were afraid to face a very bitter and biting cold. Barbara had been almost in despair when first the snow fell, fearing that her lover, who was then on another of his brief missions to England, would not have power to traverse the dreary waste of snowy country

which lay between them. But Sidney was too eager a lover to be withheld by any such obstacles as that, and had seen enough of sledging in foreign lands to know how swiftly those light conveyances can travel when the roads are all but impassable to aught else. And it was only on the previous evening that a messenger had arrived with tidings that the knight was not far behind; and all that day had Barbara kept her station at the window, watching and listening; whilst Mrs. Furnival waited with scarce less of impatience,—for Gilbert, too, would be in his master's train, and she was yearning to see once more the face of her youngest born.

Fleetly over the dazzling snow, which crackled crisply beneath her feet, fled light-footed Barbara, guided by the sound of the tinkling bells. Ivo was not far behind, but he could not keep pace with her flying footsteps; and ere the last turn in the untrodden road was reached, her approach had been seen by the driver of the foremost sledge, who threw the reins to his companion, and sprang out to meet his lady-love and clasp her in his arms.

Five minutes later, Barbara, flushed and radiant, led him into the warm hall, to the welcome of its blazing fires of pine log, closely followed by her cousin, conducting Sir Ralph Fortescue, who had been Sidney's companion on the journey.

This knight came in very different guise from that in which he had arrived from Holland the previous summer. Fortune had smiled upon him since then. On his return to his distant home he had found that the death of a rela-

tive had made him a man of some substance, and he had likewise received a post about the Court which gave him a higher standing than before. The Earl of Leicester had recommended him to the Queen, and his goodly presence and bearing had won for him the smile of royalty. Fortescue and Sidney had known each other in the Netherlands, and it was not strange that when the former heard of the proposed winter journey to Hampshire he should desire to accompany his friend thither. There was safety in numbers not to be neglected by travellers in those days, especially when the journey had to be made in the dark, inclement season of the year. So each had been glad of the company of the other, and had arrived without accident at the hospitable mansion of the Furnivals. Sir Ralph's destination was Courtland Castle; but he had been persuaded by Ivo to proceed no farther that night. The horses were weary, the last of the daylight was fading from the sky, and the road to the castle was somewhat intricate and difficult to find when deep snow hid all the usual landmarks. And so both knights were comfortably housed and lodged in the hospitable Manor-house; and with what eager interest was the news listened to which they had brought!

"You come from my dear lord," said Ursula, as soon as the more personal greetings had died away. "Tell me, I pray you, good Sir Robert, when last you saw him, and how he fared. This winter weather is ill for us wives at home — news travels so slowly and so uncertainly. Tell me that he is in good health. I trow there hath

not been much fighting of late to endanger his dear life."

"Nay, madam, in health he is well, and in reputation higher than before. But I see that I am to be the first bearer of the news of his recent advancement. You may perchance have heard how that mine uncle, the Earl of Leicester, hath resigned his appointment in these ill-fated States, and hath returned to this country. And in so doing he hath appointed the brave Lord Willoughby to be commander of the English forces in his absence. I bring you despatches in his own hand. I would have sent them forward by express, had I not deemed they would be safer with me."

Ursula held out her hand with eagerness, and was soon deep in the perusal of her lord's missive, her own pride in his advancement somewhat dashed by the reluctance she saw in him to accept the post, and the premonitions of troubles and confusion which he saw before him. And indeed Lord Willoughby, with his high-minded uprightness of character, his British love for plain-dealing, his independence of mind, and chivalrous bravery both in battle and in the council-chamber, was a man little fitted to cope with the mass of intrigue and double-dealing by which he was on all hands surrounded. He had no ambition for place, and only accepted this office because there seemed no one else to fill it. He saw his own unfitness for it, and spoke openly to his wife about his many disqualifications. He scorned and hated petty quarrels and party spirit, and was surrounded by such at every turn. He felt himself to

be impatient of control, with a keen perception of insult, and was a very proud as well as a very modest man. He was one to whom a lie was an abhorrence, at a time when diplomatic falsehood was a matter of course in the dealings of all foreign powers. Then the shameful condition of the poor soldiers was a matter of profound distress to him. The Earl of Leicester, he himself, and a number of private nobles and gentlemen had robbed themselves most generously in order to supply needs which the Queen had promised to meet; but notwithstanding this the men were in shameful plight, and lacking often the bare necessaries of life. The unwilling commander felt indeed that his task would be a hard and thankless one, and only consented to accept it from that loyalty to the Queen and the Earl which had characterized his conduct throughout. There would be no chance of his summoning his wife to his side for a considerable time to come—that Ursula plainly saw; and she folded her letter with a sigh, and turned to hear something of the eager discussion which was taking place between the others as they gathered round the supper-table.

"They talk of strange portents for the year which is to commence in a few short hours," said Ivo. "It hath been long foretold that it will be a year of trouble and peril and gloom. The sun hath been seen, they say, with a drawn sword in his mouth—a sure sign of bloodshed—and other portents of like kind have not been lacking."

"They say the end of the world will come," cried Barbara, turning to her lover, as if the secrets of the future

were open to him, so great was her loving confidence. "What sayest thou of such words? Puttest thou any faith in them?"

"Say rather that the Spanish fleet is coming, and I will say yea to that with all my heart," answered Sidney, smiling, though with something of sternness in his face. "Had it not been for the death of Santa Cruz it would have been on us ere now, and I ask you, are we prepared to meet it? Heaven grant that her Majesty's eyes may be opened even at the eleventh hour, and that in place of putting her faith in these treacherous peace negotiations, with which his Most Catholic Majesty is fooling her so as to gain time, she may victual and plenish her fleet, and arm her loyal subjects, so that they may be somewhat ready to meet this same implacable foe when he comes, as he surely will, and that ere long."

"But," cried Barbara with flashing eyes, as she glanced proudly at Ivo, "methought that great fleet had been all but destroyed, nigh upon a year ago, by our bold sea-kings, who sailed into Cadiz harbour, under the very teeth of their guns, and burned and destroyed scores of huge vessels intended to break the power of our English fleet. Ah, I would I had been there!"

Sidney smiled, and Ivo quickly said,—

"Have I not told thee times and enow, fair cousin, that great as was the damage we were able to inflict, it was but a tithe of the great armament which was destroyed? Enough mischief was done to cripple, but only to cripple, the preparations. I would the English people

had better heeded the warnings of our great Sir Francis, in lieu of making as if those burned ships comprised the whole resources of the Spanish Main."

"Ay, you may well say that," cried Sidney, firing with excitement; "and I would that they might understand the meaning of that which is going on at Ostend, Antwerp, and Ghent—how that preparations are making there for the Prince of Parma to land thousands upon thousands of his Spaniards and Walloons upon our English soil, to march upon London and take it, whilst the ships are engaging our fleet, and our soldiers are scattered up and down the coast to watch for the results of the action at sea, and keep those great vessels from flinging their soldier crews upon our unprotected shores. The enemy is working and watching, whilst we at home are dallying and trifling; and the Queen, and even my Lord Burghley, still believe that Philip of Spain is as anxious for peace as she is. It is scarce credible that the great Henry's daughter, or so keen a statesman, can be so long hoodwinked and cozened. Mr. Secretary knoweth better, and is all but in despair; but that traitorous Comptroller is ever at her Majesty's ear, and she can never forget that King Philip was once her suitor, or believe that his friendship hath been turned into the bitterest hatred."

Whilst talk on such stirring themes was being carried on by most of those who sat at the upper end of the board, Sir Ralph took but little part in the discussion, eating at first with the keen-set appetite of a man who has travelled far in a frosty air, yet all the while with something of an

air of abstraction, as if his thoughts were far away. He chanced to be placed next to Bess at table, and when the excitement of the subject in hand had engrossed all the rest, and the clamour of tongues was loud enough to cover other sounds, he turned to his companion and asked in a low voice how it fared at the castle, and how the viscount was progressing.

"He is greatly better," answered Bess, turning towards him, and recalling her mind to more homely matters. "He hath long been able to leave his bed, albeit he is still somewhat lame from the wound in his foot and the cruel handling he received. But he is yet a prisoner within the walls of the castle, for his health establishes itself but tardily, and the lung which was hurt by the sword-thrust giveth him some uneasiness since the cold hath fastened so severely upon us. Yet methinks his wife is in no wise disposed to repine that he yet requireth such care and tendance. She would be in sad fear lest some call of duty should take him from her side, were he to be wholly sound; but as it is with him now there can be no talk of any such matter, and she is happy as the day is long."

"And the Earl his father and the gentle Lady Alianora?" questioned the knight farther, crumbling his manchet of bread in his hand with something of nervousness in the action. "How is it with them? I trust they are well?"

"Ay, so they say—no one speaks contrary words; and yet it seemeth to me at times that Alianora looketh something too much like a snow-wreath to please me, were she my daughter or sister. She will not admit that she aileth

aught, but I mislike her looks none the less. She was ever something frail and spiritual to look at, but she seemeth more so than before to my eyes."

Sir Ralph said no more, but looked grave and thoughtful. He did not join much in the talk which flowed so freely amongst the party presently gathered about the fire, and seemed lost in his own meditations, which did not appear, however, of any very gloomy character. His face was hopeful and resolute, and sometimes he spoke in low tones to Bess, and she noted that in general his talk veered round to the subject of Viscount Lisle or his sister.

There was nothing very surprising in this, nor in the fact that he should desire to go over to the castle early the following day. Christmas was being quietly kept both at castle and Manor-house this year. There were feasting and merry-making amongst the dependents in both places, but for various reasons there was less of festivity than usual so far as the owners themselves were concerned. Ursula was anxious about her husband, and sorrowful in the thought of the lost babe. Humphrey's fate still cast a gloom over the household, which was doubly felt in all seasons of rejoicing; and it was happiness enough to have the two younger sons safe home without wishing to institute any of the mad frolics and high wassails which were considered appropriate to the season. The Furnivals, from their connection with the great centres of disturbance, were more affected by the threatening aspect of affairs than many in their position who knew less of public matters. It seemed to them no season for careless merry-

making and feasting. They felt as if the shadow of a great peril rested upon them, and acted accordingly.

At the castle it was the viscount's health which disposed the family to be very quiet over their Christmas festivities. The patient, although greatly better, could stand little fatigue or tumult, and craved nothing better than the constant companionship of his wife, together with that of father and sister, in the pleasant home circle round the fireside. And so there was less of feasting and frolic than was usual in such houses, and when Sir Ralph passed from Manor-house to castle, he made no advance in the matter of revelry.

As it was the first day of the year, the knight did not go thither alone. Several members of the Furnival family desired to take advantage of these gay sledges, and pay their respects to Lord Courtland and his family. It was a pretty sight to see the start from the hospitable door; and there was much laughter and some little trepidation on the part of the girls at the pace at which the sturdy steeds flew over the pure white snow. But Sir Ralph was more silent than the rest, as if engrossed in his own thoughts, and he heeded little what passed between his companions, and was yet more absent than upon the previous evening.

His reception at the castle was warm indeed. Lord Courtland had never forgotten that it was his gallantry which had saved the life of his son during the desperate sallies which had taken place before the walls of Sluys. The viscount's eyes lighted with pleasure at sight of his

old companion in arms, and both Constance and Alianora spoke welcoming words which fell sweetly on his ear; nor was he slack in grateful acceptance of the hospitality so promptly proffered.

"I feared you had forgotten us and your promise to come once again," said Lisle, looking his old comrade well over with smiling eyes; and, indeed, no one could fail to be struck by the grace and dignity of the soldier, now that he had recovered from the effects of months of hardship and privation, and had been smiled upon by fair Fortune to boot.

When he had first appeared at the castle it had been in somewhat sorry guise. Famine and hard service had given a gauntness to his tall figure which had been enhanced by the threadbare scantness of his wardrobe, and he had appeared rather in the guise of a Knight of the Rueful Countenance than in that of a gallant and prosperous English officer. But now all this was amended. His fine figure had regained its graceful proportions; his dress was plain but rich, and in excellent taste, with the trimness and finish which in all ages has been characteristic of the military man's habiliments. His open gray eyes were no longer sunk in deep caverns, and his face looked younger and more full of hope and fire. Lisle scanned him with undisguised pleasure, and smiled as at last he said,—

"Now, methinks I see mine old comrade once again—or rather I should say my young one. In sooth, it was within the walls of Sluys that we both grew old together. And ever since we have been home again we have e'en been growing young."

Fortescue returned the glance of his friend smilingly yet keenly.

"I would thou hadst regained as much as I; yet it is marvellous to see thee even as thou art, trusty comrade. By the rood, I will own I never thought to see thee on thine own feet again. I trow thy wife hath been something of a witch to nurse thee back to life. There have been moments when I have said that I did thee but scant grace in dragging thee within our lines; but I will say it no more after to-day, for I think this maketh amends for all thou wentest through to achieve it."

Lisle's glance at his wife was better than all answer, and Fortescue watched it with something of wistfulness creeping into his honest eyes. He turned them next upon Alianora, who sat with her old companions Bess and Barbara in the embrasure of a window; and as she had no thought to spare for him then, he could study her face without fear of detection.

He thought he saw some slight change. She had ever seemed to him, since the first hour of their meeting, rather a creature of fire and snow than an actual corporeal being of flesh and blood. The ethereal look which Alianora had borne all her life long had greatly grown upon her of late. Her frame seemed too slight and airy to tread the common earth: she appeared to float rather than walk; and in her deep, earnest eyes there dwelt ofttimes a strange, far-away expression, as though her thoughts were not of earth, but of some far-off world in which she dwelt alone and apart. Yet the expression of her face, as Lisle and Constance had

alike noted, was hardly as mournful as it had been in times past. They had said one to the other that there was more of hope in it than had been seen there of late years; but she spoke not a word of herself, and it was hard to read what was in her thoughts, or guess what manner of hope it was that had come to her.

The winter days which chained the household within doors, and cut them off from the outside world, were no bad friends to Fortescue or the purpose he had in hand. Blinding snow-storms without hindered all manner of communication with even the nearest of neighbours, and shut up the castle inmates within their solid walls. The intense cold affected the viscount somewhat, and kept him for the greater part of the day within his own suite of apartments, which were made as warm as huge fires could keep them. If he came downstairs at all, it was only towards evening; and during the long hours of the day Fortescue was left to the society of Alianora and her father, save at such times as he visited his old comrade and talked over former days with him.

Alianora was very gentle and friendly towards him. She liked the soldier for his own sake, and was grateful to him for what he had done for her brother. He seemed like an old friend now; and when he and the viscount sat, as they often did, by the hour together, talking over the siege and the stirring days they had spent within those crumbling walls, Alianora loved to sit by and listen—her eyes glowing strangely in the darkness, and her breath coming thick and fast with excitement, so that Lisle

would sometimes smile to himself, and say that the soldier spirit of his race was not lacking even to his gentle sister.

It was a great grief and a source of much indignation to the viscount to hear from his friend of the ungenerous treatment received at the hands of the Queen by their gallant general, Sir Roger Williams, who had so valiantly defended Sluys, and despite the desperate state of the garrison and people, had demanded and obtained all the honours of war, when surrender was made inevitable through Leicester's failure to throw in relief. Indeed it is to be feared that the very intrepidity of the brave Welshman had aroused an unworthy jealousy in the heart of the Earl; and when, after his many and gallant deeds in her Majesty's service, he appeared at Court, he was but coldly received, and although his poverty was but too apparent, he received nothing in recompense from the niggardly Queen.

"And that," cried Lisle in energetic accents, "is the way this man is treated—this man whose courage and soldier-like talents were so admired by Parma that when he entered the city he saluted with the greatest respect our gallant commander, and urged him to enter the Spanish service, to fight against the common foe of Christendom, the Turks.—You were witness to that, Fortescue. Tell them the answer made to the Prince by the brave soldier under whom we have served."

"Ay, that I will; and I would her Majesty had been there to hear it herself. Mayhap then she would scarce

have treated him so scurvily. 'My sword,' he replied, 'belongs to her royal Majesty, Queen Elizabeth, above and before all the world. When her Highness has no farther use for it, it is at the service of the King of Navarre;' and with that he saluted the Prince, and passed on in his battered array. And she—her gracious Majesty—will let traitors and sycophants have her ear, whilst men like this go unnoticed and unrewarded." Then stopping suddenly short, he added with a smile (for he had but lately come from Court, and had felt the fascination which Elizabeth was wont to cast upon those who approached her): "Her gracious Majesty is grossly cozened by the false traitors by whom she is surrounded. She is in truth a gracious and noble lady, and would act a nobler part were she but better advised. I would thou couldest have heard her ask for thee, good comrade. She bid me tell her of thee, and how thou hadst fared. She listened most smilingly to the story of thy marriage, and even recalled the name of thy fair lady, said she had seen her with her own eyes, and called on her ladies to vouch for her truth when she declared she had foretold that one day she would appear at Court. She said she had often missed 'her Nightingale,' and asked when thou wouldest be ready and fit to appear in her presence. Methinks she hath a true heart and ready grace when she is not unworthily advised."

Loyalty to the person of the Queen was never seriously shaken in the hearts of those who had basked in the sunshine of her smile, although there could not but be moments when all patience was sorely tried by her political

caprices. Perhaps Alianora hardly shared this personal affection, and certainly any talk of a return to Court or town life always caused her many a qualm of shrinking and of misery. And yet was it likely that her father would remain long content with this quiet life, now that his health had been re-established? and if he went back to Court, would he be likely to let her stay behind? There had been much of peace and even of happiness of a subdued kind in these past days, but who could say how long the calm and freedom from care would last? Alianora felt very helpless in regard to the future, like a frail bark driven at the mercy of the elements, powerless to direct her own course, and with no sheltering harbour in sight. The lot of an unmarried woman in those days was seldom an enviable one, and this may have been one of the reasons why fathers were inclined to marry off their daughters in somewhat summary fashion, in many cases whilst they were still young children.

Lisle and his wife were alike anxious to see Alianora settled in life, if only she could find happiness in such settlement. They watched with sympathy and eagerness the obvious courtship going on during those inclement winter days, and it really seemed as if Alianora took pleasure in the society and converse of Sir Ralph. She certainly did not shrink from him as she had shrunk from the gay gallants at Court, and that some measure of friendship existed between them they could not doubt. The Earl openly expressed to them his conviction that at last his daughter's future was to be assured. Fortescue had asked

and received his permission to pay his addresses to Alianora, and the father had plainly no notion that anything but a favourable answer would be returned. He had frequently expressed some impatience and displeasure at the extraordinary caprice, as he had termed it, of his daughter, and had been seriously annoyed at the fact of her still remaining single; but recent events had driven this matter into a secondary place, and only now was it beginning to revive and give him cause for vexation and solicitude.

"But we will put an end to all uncertainty, and that soon," he remarked to his son, with an air of complaisant satisfaction. "Sir Ralph is even now, as I believe, pacing the long gallery with her, and pleading his cause. He goes to her backed by my approval and authority, and the maid is favourably inclined towards him for his own good parts. We shall soon see an end of these puling looks and moping ways. A husband and a babe or so will make a new woman of her. She hath been too long indulged in her fantasy for loneliness and solitude. Our good friend Mrs. Furnival spoilt her in her childhood, and she hath never got over this same spoiling all her life long."

Lisle made no direct reply. He and his wife knew well the true reason for Alianora's settled sadness and her resolute determination not to wed; but the secret had ever been kept from the Earl. Yet now it seemed, even to them, that the time had come to try and forget this old wound, and enter upon a new life with one who was in every point worthy.

Lord Courtland left his son's room presently, and the

viscount and his wife were left alone. They sat together silently in the gathering twilight, both thinking of Alianora, and wondering if an end were at length about to be put to her long sorrow, when the door was swiftly and silently opened, and the maiden herself glided in in her noiseless fashion, casting herself suddenly down at her brother's feet, and hiding her face in the costly fur mantle that was thrown lightly over him.

Lisle gave a quick glance at his wife, and laid his thin hand caressingly on his sister's head.

"Hath aught happened to grieve or disturb thee, sweet sister?" he asked. "Tell me the cause of thy grief or thy gladness, whichever it may be. May I not rejoice or grieve with thee, as the case warrants? I wot thou canst not in this short time have any very troublous tidings to relate."

"Oh, good my brother," she cried, not looking up, and speaking in muffled tones, "hast thou known aught of this same thing?"

"Nay, thou must tell me first what the thing may be," answered Lisle, in the same caressing tone. "I am no wizard, little one, to read the thoughts of thine heart."

"He hath said that he loveth me," cried Alianora, in the same muffled way. "He hath asked me to wed with him, and hath said that thou and my father wish it. He spake such brave words and true as went to my very heart. Oh tell me, what must I do? what must I do? I cannot bear to break his heart; and yet—and yet—"

"And why shouldest thou do so, sweet Alianora?"

questioned the viscount gently. "Surely he is a brave, true-hearted knight, and thou owest to his bravery the life of thy brother. Methinks that thou hast taken pleasure in his company, and hast found in him much to admire and, perchance, to love. Then why canst thou not lend favourable ear to his suit? Is he not noble enough for thee?"

Alianora raised her face for a moment and looked full at her brother.

"Nay, brother mine, I have no such unworthy thought, as thou must know well. Thou knowest that I must ever love and honour him, were it but for what he did for thee. It cuts me to the heart to give him pain. Yet what can I do when my heart is not my own? Can I act so traitorous a part by him as to seem to heed his words, and take the love he offers, when I have naught to give him in return save the poor husk of a heart from which the kernel is missing?"

"I trow I know what thou meanest, my sister. Thou art still thinking of the lost comrade of thy childhood, to whom thy love was pledged. Thou knowest how I have felt for thee, and bid thee have faith and patience so long as a ray of hope remained. But years have gone by—long, weary years—and still he cometh not, and hope hath died out in all hearts; and thy youth is passing away in hopeless waiting—the hopeless waiting which is worse than death. Thou hast been very loyal and faithful—true-hearted as woman ever was before; but thinkest thou not sometimes that could thy brave young lover see thee

now, he would be the first to bid thee cast away thy hopeless sorrow, and try to find happiness in a loyal love, loyally tendered? Methinks the time hath come when it were no treason to the dead to think a little kindly of the living."

Alianora's eyes were full of tears.

"Ah, if I did but know him dead—perchance then it might be possible. But—"

"Sweet sister, think me not harsh when I tell thee that if not dead he is as dead to thee; and truly I believe not that he can be living yet. If he hath not suffered for his faith, he will long since have perished at his oar in the galleys. I have seen somewhat of that misery, and I trow that no man born to the freedom of a life such as his was could long linger in that fearful slavery. He would pine away and die, as the strongest do more than the weaker ones; or a happier quietus might come to him in the form of a bullet from a Turkish vessel. But living now I verily believe he cannot be; and it is for this reason that I would fain see thy tears dried. I bid thee not forget—thou art not of the stuff that may do so; but if thou wilt let me tell all thy tale to this true-hearted gentleman, I warrant me thou wilt receive from him all knightly reverence and patience, and that he will comfort thee first, and win thy true affection later, when thy tears are dried."

Alianora heaved a deep sigh. Perhaps no one could fully understand her shrinking from the thought of wedlock with another, even though that other were so worthy a lover as her brother's gallant friend. Her heart was

truly hungry for love; she was very lonely, and longed for the rest and peace of a home of her own. But yielding herself up thus was like abandoning her last faint hope of Humphrey's return; and yet, if by some miracle he were still living, and should return only to find her the wife of another, what a terrible death-blow would that be to all her chance of wedded happiness! and how could she ever bear to look upon his face again? Her heart cried out that it would be treachery—that she could not do it; and yet there would come over her the thought that in casting away this noble love she was giving deepest pain to one to whom she owed a debt of immeasurable gratitude. She knew too well the pain of hopeless love to be willing lightly to inflict it upon another. If the best happiness of this world might never be hers, might it not yet be her duty to refrain from blasting the happiness of another? She had had lovers before whom she had dismissed without a pang; but good Sir Ralph was not one to be so treated, and she was put into a maze of perplexity and distress by his addresses.

"I know not what to do," she murmured. "It grieveth me to give him pain; yet how may I forswear myself and tell him that I love him, when my heart is buried beneath the waves of a hopeless sorrow?"

"Nay, thou shalt speak no word that is not very sooth," answered Lisle. "I myself will tell him all thy story, an thou wilt have it so; and he shall know wherefore thou hast been so wan and sad, and there shall be no secret betwixt you. I trow he will be as glad for leave

to try and dry thy tears as for any assurance which I could give him. He must have noted that there was something weighing on thy mind. He will, perchance, rejoice that it is naught but the shadow of a dead and gone love."

But Alianora suddenly started to her feet as if in some uncontrollable emotion, and her hands sought her throat as if to loosen some band which went nigh to choke her. She clasped her hands together and stood trembling and quivering. Her brother gazed at her in amaze.

"Nay, nay, I cannot bear it," she cried suddenly. "I strive to think, perchance, I ought and can bring my mind to it; but when I hear it spoke in words, I feel as if the very dead would rise against me did I do this thing. O brother, brother mine, call me not wayward, self-willed, selfish! but listen, and I will tell thee all. It may be but folly, fantasy, madness, an thou wilt; but there are moments when some strange illumination of mind comes o'er me, and it seemeth to me as if for a moment the future lay open as a book. The moment is so brief that ere I can look the clouds roll down, and I know no more. But whilst that flash lasteth I seem to see a glimpse of coming woe or coming gladness. Thou smilest—I marvel not; I would smile at another did I not know what the strange sense was like. And hear me more, sweet brother. Ere Humphrey went from us, I had this same premonition of evil—evil ever bound up in my mind with the thought of the sea. I might not stay him from his duty; yet methinks I knew when he set foot on deck that trouble

dark and dreary menaced him. I said as much to Lady Willoughby; and have not my words come true?"

"But too true," answered Lisle, still uncertain whither all this tended; "so true that I would fain thou shouldest seek comfort elsewhere, as we have—"

"Yet, my brother, listen once again," cried Alianora, her face full of that strange mystic light of which mention has been made before. "As I had strange flashes of warning that peril menaced him before, just so have I had moments of deep conviction that he will one day come back to me, and that that day is not far distant. They have come to me strangely often of late—I know not how nor why. As I have been sitting musing, I seem to be caught up in marvellous fashion, and a great light shines about me, and I hear his voice—*his* voice—and it is every time clearer, stronger than the last. As thou wast just now speaking I heard it once again. Oh, my brother, how can I give heed to what thou sayest when those tones are in mine ears? My heart tells me that I shall see him yet—see him when this mighty Armament shall sail down upon our coasts with its hundreds and thousands of soldiers and slaves. Dost thou smile at such words? Nay, but give me time, and I will strive to do all thou biddest me; only—only urge me no more now. How can I do thy bidding when this light seemeth to be shining round me, telling me I may yet hope?"

Lisle gazed at her with something of a sad smile. Truth to tell, he had little faith in any such visions. The dreamy, mystic girl was just one of those so constituted as

to indulge in many strange fancies and fantasies, and feed her heart upon them. Her father would have chidden her roundly, and bid her speak no more of such idle follies; but Lisle was far too gentle, too sympathetic and chivalrous, to distress her by any such words. He only looked earnestly into her face, which was transfigured by the intensity of her emotion, and he bent forward and took her hand in his.

"Sweet sister, I bid thee do naught that thou mayest not do willingly; but there is another warm, living heart bound up alike in thine answer. Is he to be bidden to give up all hope? or is thy wish but for delay—till time hath proved whether this same hope will show itself to be true?"

She looked back at him long and earnestly, as if slowly waking out of a dream. When she spoke it was in her former manner, gentle and subdued, without fire or vehemence of any kind.

"Brother," she said, "thou art very good to me, and I would fain do as I see thou wouldest that I should. Yet, I prithee, give me time—give me at least till this great thing hath happened, which men say may not long be delayed. If these great ships sail away and bring him not, then will I yield myself to be the wife of thy friend, an he care yet to wed with one who hath but half a heart. For mine own part, I would choose to keep ever as I am, even as if I were wedded to him whom I have ever loved. Yet give me but this time of grace, and I will strive to do what may be required of me. I would

not that another should feel the pain that I have almost learned to love as a friend. For thy sake I will do this thing, if my love cometh not back to me anon."

"So be it, sweet sister," answered Lisle; "I will tell thy tale to our good friend, and he shall know all. If we are told truly, this Armament cannot long be delayed. We will wait till it hath come, and if it leaveth us yet alive and free when it hath done its worst, we will talk again of this same thing; but till then thou shalt be at peace."

She gave him a grateful glance, knowing that when he took her cause in hand it was safe. She saw he had no belief in Humphrey's return, and it surprised her not. She knew not how far she credited her own wild dreams. But for the present she was left in peace to try to bring her mind to thoughts of a second love, if the first were to be for ever lost to her.

Lisle took an early opportunity of telling his comrade all that had occurred. Fortescue listened to the story with deep attention, and at its close he heaved a heavy sigh.

"Methinks I might almost as well give up hope from this same minute," he said, as he looked away into the fire. "A heart like that may not be won a second time. She will never forget."

"It may be your hap to comfort her," said Lisle with a smile. "She was very young when last she saw him, and if this fancy fails her she will need such comfort the more."

"I would lay down my life in her service," cried Fortescue, with sudden fire; "but I trow I shall never be her husband."

And then he rose and walked away, and Lisle, looking at his wife, said with something of a sigh,—

"I fear me the world is out of joint for him; but I know not how to cheer him. I dare not bid him hope too much, lest he may have judged his own case better than we have done. He may have read the maid's heart more truly than we."

That same day Sir Ralph left the castle, despite the deep snow, and it was only later on that his friends discovered that he had taken temporary refuge beneath the hospitable roof of the Furnivals, where his friend Sir Robert Sidney still remained weather-bound.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE CALL TO ARMS.

"THE Spaniards are coming! the Spaniards are coming!"

This was the message that was flying like wild-fire throughout England during the early months of the year, which had opened with so many portents, as it was said, of coming woe.

The long-drawn and delusive negotiations, which had done so much harm and blinded so many eyes, were at last practically broken off, and even the Queen, who had put so much faith in them, was obliged to own that she could no longer look upon Philip as a possible friend. His huge Armada, the talk and wonder of the world, was only awaiting a favourable time for sailing to bear down upon her coasts, and turn her free Protestant England into a fief of Spain, establishing the fearful and horrible Inquisition upon soil which had many times ere this run rivers of blood in defence of that glorious liberty which has ever been the bulwark of national life.

And what of the people thus threatened? Did their hearts fail them when they knew that the most powerful

king in Christendom was, as it were, at their very gates? —when they knew that behind him was all the power of the Papal See, the greatest navy of the world, and the riches of Mexico and the Indies? Did they tremble for their land and their liberties? Did they desire to treat with the foe—to sue for a dishonourable peace—to rid themselves of danger by some weak compromise, as nations in like peril have done ere now to their own undoing?

Let us see what was the spirit of the nation at this crisis, and how her sons bore themselves in face of overwhelming perils.

The Royal Navy—if the term may be allowed to pass —was in but a sorry state. The Queen, as has been before stated, was parsimonious from long habit, and there had been considerable drain on the exchequer in regard to the assistance sent to the States. Thirty-four small vessels were all she could boast for the defence of her coasts against the huge navy of Spain; and the Council, in dismay, sent a message to the Corporation of London to ask what they would be able and willing to contribute in the way of ships and men to the support of the nation.

"What do you desire of us?" asked the body thus appealed to. And the Council suggested that they should make their contribution fifteen ships and five thousand men—no inconsiderable demand, seeing that it was equal to nearly the half of the navy.

Two days later—only two days, and there were no rapid means of communication in those times—the city returned its answer to the Council.

"We humbly entreat her Majesty and Council," so ran the message, "to do us the grace to accept, in token of our perfect love and loyalty, ten thousand men and thirty ships, all completely and amply furnished for war."

And London did but give the cue and set the noble example. What she had been proud to do for her country, other cities hastened to accomplish likewise. Dockyards rang with the sound of hammers and anvils. Ships seemed to rise like magic from the hands of the hundreds and thousands of busy workmen engaged upon them. Merchants gave up their private sloops and trading-vessels for the service of their country, and not the vessels alone, but the means of sending them out, fully equipped, against the monster ships of Spain.

And if this was the spirit all along the coast, how was it inland, where—in the eyes of Philip of Spain at least—thirty years of peace had enfeebled and enervated the energies of a once warlike nation, whilst the change made in warfare through the recent introduction of gunpowder would of necessity render their helplessness and inexperience all the greater?

That England could be formidable on the sea no nation better knew than Spain; but the latter had made provision for that in the erection of those floating monsters of the deep which were to sweep the light English vessels from the face of the waters. And once let a trained Spanish army effect a landing on the unprotected shores of the little island, and not a Spaniard doubted but that nothing lay before him but a rapid march to victory, and

such boundless plunder as should fill the coffers of Spain and make rich for life every soldier who took part in that triumphal procession.

And how did these same Englishmen feel whose lives and liberties were thus calmly threatened; who were credited with lacking power to repel a single advance made by land; who were accounted so unskilled in war that the invading vessels came laden with the nobles of Spain, who were to apportion amongst themselves the fair lands which were so soon to be theirs?

Well, let us visit one district of the Queen's realm at this time, and see what is stirring there; and recollect that what was going on in one place was going on throughout the length and breadth of the land. For one spirit seemed to work in every breast—the heart of a mighty nation beat as if it were that of one man; and to their honour be it spoken, the Roman Catholics, whom Philip of Spain had reckoned upon as allies ready to flock to his standard the moment it should be unfurled, showed no less loyalty to their country and their Queen than did the Protestants, who had the fires of the Inquisition to look forward to should the Spaniards once gain a footing in the land.

The Queen was reaping now the fruits of that religious toleration which had been one of the marked and most enlightened features of her reign. Perhaps justice has hardly been done to this high-minded toleration, which was so greatly in advance of the spirit of the times. Uniformity of worship had been insisted on, for it had not

entered into the minds of men as yet to conceive of such a thing as the advisability of varying liturgies in the same country; but the Book of Common Prayer, although it really pleased no individual section, admitted of such varying interpretations as should bring it within the consciences of almost every sect from Romanists to Puritans, if all would but take an enlightened view of its doctrines. Thus it was that outward conformity was not intended to press with real heaviness on any portion of the inhabitants of the country; and the Queen herself regarded it as a monstrous thing that any one should suffer death for his opinions, and sought in every way to avoid inflicting this penalty for conscience' sake. It is true that some suffered in her reign; but it must be kept in mind that these were nearly always men who had mingled treason with their religious non-conformity, and that the crime which caused their death was in reality the former and not the latter. When it is remembered what terrible perils so often menaced Elizabeth, both at home and abroad, from the Roman Catholics, and how many plots of assassination were conceived by them, like those which had been successfully carried out in other countries, it is impossible not to give great honour to the clemency and enlightened forbearance which held the Queen back from wholesale retaliation; and truly she deserved the loyalty and devotion which her Catholic subjects showed in this hour of peril.

When the Spanish Armada was known to be coming, there were those who counselled the Queen to consult her own safety by taking the lives of some of the leading

Roman Catholics in the kingdom; but she repelled the ignoble suggestion with horror and loathing, and amply was she rewarded for the trust she reposed in her people's loyalty, as the result was soon to show.

A traveller journeying through the pleasant woodland roads of England during that sunny midsummer of 1588 would, without doubt, feel some surprise at the stir, the tumult, the unwonted excitement which he met with at every turn. What strange wave of feeling was it sweeping over the land, carrying all before it as it moved? What was the meaning of the electric thrill flashing through the length and breadth of the land, stirring the pulses, firing the hearts, quickening the vitality of every man, woman, and child in the kingdom?—raising such tumult of enthusiasm, such intense and vehement loyalty, as united friend and foe in bonds of common brotherhood only felt at times of strange crisis?

Midsummer was upon the land, and it was no unusual thing at such a season to see the people collecting all the dry wood in the forests in order to burn it at the great festival which in every village was celebrated by the lighting of great bonfires. But surely it was something strange to see the numbers who had turned out to gather wood just now, and more strange still to note where the fuel was taken; for instead of carrying it to the village green as usual, the peasants piled it in carts drawn by strong horses, and these carts were dragged laboriously up to the highest points in all the country round, the wood being deposited in huge heaps on the tops of the loftiest hills.

Let us follow this groaning and creaking waggon of rude construction, labouring along through some of the woodland aisles of the great New Forest of Hampshire. It has been piled high by willing hands, and now is followed by numbers of men and women, who give their aid to the straining horses, and in the end lade themselves with the faggots and carry them panting, but with alacrity, for the last and steepest part of the way. Their destination is a high point upon a ridge of hills clothed for the most part with thick wood. But this cone-like apex stands out bare and bleak, and from its lofty eminence a view can be obtained of a pleasant and smiling valley, through which runs a laughing stream; and beside the stream stands a comfortable old Manor-house, whose warm red roofs and gables, and smiling corn and grass lands, make a pleasant break in the monotony of rolling wood and heathery hillside.

And in one of the large meadows down below there seems to be something unwonted stirring. From so high an eminence it looks as if the green pasture were covered with ants or bees, which, in dark moving masses, crawl this way or that with more or less of visible purpose. Yet it is plain that these same moving figures must be those of human beings; and a dark-eyed girl, standing bareheaded in the bright sunlight, is looking down upon the spectacle with straining eyes and a flush upon her cheek.

"Honora," she cried, "Honora, see there! That is the muster of the train-bands. Hold up the boy, and bid him look and remember. Tell him his father is there,

leading one company; and methinks I can see the white plume of my Lord Lisle at the head of his following. O Honora, why was I not born a man, that I might bear arms too! Feel you not as if your heart would eat itself out in vain longing to take the field, and go forth to conquer or to die?"

"Ay, truly, there are moments when methinks we all feel that," cried Honora, who was standing beside Barbara near to the summit of the hill, holding in her hand a fine and sturdy boy of nigh upon three summers. He was a beautiful child, looking much older than his years, his dark eyes full of vivid intelligence, his speech much more clear and comprehensible than that of his compeers. He was staring down at the moving specks, and presently tugged at his mother's hand, and pointed at them interrogatively.

"Men, my little son," answered Honora, stooping down and holding him tightly with her arm—"brave soldiers ready to fight the wicked Spaniards, who are coming to try to kill us all; soldiers who will die sooner than they shall set foot upon English soil; brave men, who have come from their cottages and their homes in answer to the call from their country, and whom we must all love and honour for what they will do for us."

"Father there?" said the boy, his eyes still on the moving muster below.

"Yes, little one, father is there with fifty strong men; and the brave Lord Lisle, who fought so well before, is there too, teaching the men what to do and how to do it. See, when they move from place to place they are obeying

his word of command; and thou canst see his horse galloping from one part of the field to another, teaching them all their duty. Oh, my little son, thou must love and honour those brave men gathered there; for there is not one of them who will not die like a hero ere harm or danger shall come near me or thee."

Honora's voice shook, and the child looked into her face, a new light in his bright eyes.

"Me fight too," he said.

"Ay, so thou shalt one day, an thy country need thee," said the young mother, pressing a passionate kiss upon his lips. "When the call of duty comes, thy mother will never hold thee back; but thou art too young yet, my precious treasure. Thou must stay with mother still, and take care of her."

"And kill the wicked Spaniards if they come. *Will* they come?" asked the boy, looking up suddenly.

"God in his mercy grant that they may not," cried Honora, pressing her child closer to her with a convulsive shudder; whilst Barbara suddenly bent down and took the boy's hands in both of hers.

"Little William," she said in a strange, tense voice, "knowest thou what we women and children of England will do if ever those accursed Spaniards land upon our shores, and having killed our men—for whilst one soldier remains alive no foreign foot will menace our dwellings—come marching upon our defenceless homes? Then I will tell thee, boy. I will tell thee what I will do, mine own self, if such a thing befall. I will take a gun in mine

hands, and I will kill thee, little one. I will kiss thee first, my sweet, and I will shoot thee afterwards, and thy sweet mother there beside thee—thy mother, who hath been as a sister to me since I can recollect aught. And I will fire the home above our heads. I will fire every stack, every barn, every shed within reach. Those I love the best I will the soonest kill, and the dearer each spot is to me, the more quickly will I lay the burning brand to rafter or beam. Dost thou look with thy wondering eyes upon me, little one? Ay, so thou mayest, for thou knowest naught of the horrors ten thousand times worse than death which ever follow the footsteps of war—such war as these same Spaniards wage. But sooner than these soldiers set one foot within our peaceful fields, I will e'en do as I say. I will kill every creature whom I love, and I will fling myself last into the burning pile, and perish even as brave women have perished before now, ere they would fall alive into the hands of the foe."

Barbara's eyes glittered strangely, her hands were clasped tightly together, her breath came and went through her clenched teeth. And as Honora, her eyes sparkling with tears caused by the rush of her emotion, placed an arm about her neck, and said in a stifled voice, "Ah, talk not so; God save us from such horrors!" she drew herself up, and stretched out her hands with a passionate gesture over the smiling country, and said,—

"Ay, Honora, God grant we may be saved from such fate! But other countries have been devastated in like fashion; and sooner than live to see such scenes, I would

do even as I have said. Oh, the death would be sweet, methinks, that was died to save self and those most loved from such a fate. Honora, think not I boast idly of what I dare not do. I would do it—I *will* do it—and methinks half the daughters of England will do the same. If those same cruel Spaniards think to walk over our fair land, to plunder and destroy, they shall find the work hath been so well done before them that there will be naught left for them. Smoking ruins, dead corpses, blackened fields alone, shall greet their eyes. They shall walk on through a land of desolation to cities of the dead. O England, England, my country! cannot thy daughters serve thee even as thy sons? And if thy sons may not keep the foreign foe from thy shores, at least thy daughters shall show to him that he hath gained only a barren victory over a land swept from end to end by death and destruction. Do I not know it? do I not feel it? Beats there one heart in all this land that would not far, far sooner sleep for ever in death than live to see the foot of foreign power planted on our shores? I will not credit it! I wot if we could sink our fair land in the waves, and obliterate it from the face of the earth, we would do it, and do it proudly, sooner than see it given over to the foe."

Barbara's eyes were glowing, her breath came thick and fast. Honora, gentler spirited, yet not less courageous, gazed upon her with a certain reverence and admiration; whilst the little boy, only half understanding, yet quickened in mind by the throbbing excitement and passion of patriotism about him, clenched his little fists and set

his teeth, shouting that he would keep the wicked men away—they should not hurt any one he loved whilst he was by.

Honora held him in her arms and kissed him, and Barbara bent her dark, kindling glance upon him in a sort of stern approval.

"I wot he hath the soldier-spirit in him," she said. "I would he were old enough to bear a share in this glorious struggle; for glorious it will—it must be, be the end victory or—"

But she spake not the word, only her lips closed one over the other in a look that warriors wear when they lead a forlorn hope. Honora silently pressed her hand; but the little boy uttered a shout of delight, for at that moment appeared a train of hot and weary peasants, dragging up to a huge pile upon the highest eminence of the hill the faggots and billets of wood with which they had laden themselves. Gilbert and his father were there directing the construction of the pile, and in a little rude hut hard by were barrels containing tar and pitch and other inflammable substances which might be poured over the whole when the time had come.

Little William Seymour, who had been brought by his mother to witness the final construction of the huge beacon fire, ran about in great excitement and glee, helping to pile on the sticks and logs, and thinking everything a sort of game for his express amusement. And when weary of his occupation, he came trotting back to his mother, who still stood with Barbara looking on at the scene.

"What do they do it for?" he asked in his baby fashion; and again it was Barbara, not Honora, who answered the question. Seating herself on a low fragment of wall hard by, she took the child upon her knee, and looking into his wondering face she told him the meaning of the scene he was gazing upon with baby curiosity.

"Thou askest the meaning of yon great pile of wood, little one? Well, I will tell thee what it is for; and do thou hearken and heed, that when thou art grown to manhood thou mayest remember the hour when thou sawest it, and helped to pile it up with thine own baby hands. Listen, then, little one. Thou hast heard us speak of the Spaniards—those cruel, wicked men, against whom Uncle Ivo hath been fighting by sea, and the brave Lord Willoughby and Lord Lisle on land? Well, somewhere upon that wide ocean yonder, that thou canst see glimmering far away in the distance, there is, or will soon be, a great fleet of huge ships, laden with soldiers, slowly sailing, sailing, sailing nearer and nearer to these shores; and the ships have been built, and the soldiers and sailors mustered, for no other purpose than to conquer our fair land, killing and destroying all who resist them, that they may take the kingdom away from our good Queen, and set the crown upon the head of that most wicked prince, who will wish that the whole of Protestant England had but one body, that he might cast it at once into the flames."

The child did not probably comprehend all this preamble, but he understood enough to nod his head in a

vehement assent, and to clench his little fists and shake them menacingly in the direction in which the Spanish fleet might be supposed to lie.

Barbara stooped to imprint one passionate kiss upon his flushed cheek, and then she went on with her tale.

"Yes, little William, that is how you feel, and that is, I trust and believe, what every Englishman feels in all this royal realm, be he hind in the fields or nobleman in palace walls; and that is one reason why these great piles of wood are being built up upon every high hill-top throughout the land. We do not trust in our brave soldiers and sailors alone to defend our country from the foe; we look to every man, ay, and to every woman, in that kingdom to rise in the defence of our liberties, our lives, and our faith. Listen then, little one. Some day, or some night, if this great fleet be not turned back ere it reaches our shores, some one will see those great ships sailing, sailing down against us; and when that happens, that man or that woman will rush to one of these great piles of dry wood and set it in a blaze. When the blaze is seen upon the next height by the watcher who will be there, he will set light to his, and so on throughout the length and breadth of the land. Those fires will go leaping along our English heights, and as they go they will kindle such a fire, I wot, in the hearts of all those who look thereon as shall suffice for the task in hand, be that task what it may."

Barbara paused for a moment; her throat was swelling, her eyes were blinded by the dazzle of such tears as only come in moments of supreme emotion. But she dashed

the scalding drops away, and continued speaking in tones which vibrated strangely through the still, sunny air.

"Ay, little one, listen, and forget not when thou art grown, and be thou proud to call thyself an Englishman. I trow that when our hill-tops are ablaze with fiery warnings, when these beacon-signals shall flash from one end of the land to the other with their tidings of dread import, there will not be lacking hundreds and thousands, ay, and tens of thousands, of our bravest and best, who will feel such answering fire in their hearts that they will rush proudly and joyously forth to conquer or to die. Little one, I spoke awhile ago of killing thee ere I would let thee fall into the hands of foreign foemen, and so I would were that moment of choice to come; but, darling, I believe not that it will. Oh, methinks were the Spaniards tenfold more than they be, that little England, as they scornfully call her, would hold them all at bay! What can an invader do when every son makes himself a soldier, that he may wield sword and spear in her defence? How can they hope to subjugate a nation every soul in which would die a thousand deaths sooner than bend beneath a foreign yoke? Ay, let them come—let them try—let them do their worst! Let them build such mighty ships that the ocean groans beneath them, and fill them with steel-clad men, veterans seasoned with many a year of warfare; and let them set these in array against our light vessels and our unskilled troops unversed in war—fishermen from the coast, hinds from the fields, miners from the dark caves of the earth; let them set their vaunted array against our poor, despised

sons of old England, and yet I wot that the fire of love and loyalty which will blaze in the heart of each English peasant will make him a match, ay, and more than a match, for these same proud warriors, who think to make us quail and quake before them. What! hath not might been conquered by right again and yet again in the annals of this world? And shall England fall before a foreign foe? Did not the shepherd boy slay the giant champion of the Philistines with a sling and a stone? And is not our case like unto his? They come against us with a sword and with a spear; but we go out to meet them in the strength of the Lord God of hosts—the God who will judge betwixt man and man, nation and nation; who will succour the oppressed in the day of trouble, and lay in the dust the proud oppressor who hath vaunted himself in the multitude of his host. We are fighting for our faith as well as for our lives. Why need we fear when we have the God of battles upon our side?"

"Ay, truly," said Mr. Furnival, who in common with many of the assembled peasants had come up, attracted by the tones of Barbara's voice, "we must look upwards to the great Ruler of the earth for help and succour in our hour of need. He who holdeth the sea in the hollow of His hand, and taketh up the isles as a very little thing, He it is who will be our helper and defender now, blessing the means we have taken against the foe alike of our homes and our faith. It is the part of every Englishman to strain every nerve against that foe, and having done this, to look to the King of kings to bless the result. He

who gave power to Gideon to overthrow the host of Midian with his little band of three hundred, will, if it be His purpose, give us power to overcome even this great host. Therefore I say to each one of you, as our Lord Himself commanded His disciples, 'Watch and pray;' and forget not, in the strained excitement of watching, that prayer is, after all, the greater power.—You women and children at home, who cannot come forth to fight, you can pray for those who have so gone forth; and be sure that no earnest prayer is thrown away or lost ere it reach the ears that are always open and attent. And now I have done. I came not hither to preach to you; but in these days of menaced peril, it may be that we may never all meet again in this world face to face: therefore, whilst I thank you all for the loyalty and brave courage you have each one shown, ay, and will show again when the hour we wait for comes, I would commend you, too, to the protection of the great God of heaven and earth, and pray that if we meet no more in this world, each one may be upheld in doing his duty even to the death; and that we may meet again in another good land where strife and peril and death enter not—'where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest.'"

A silence fell upon the little company as the master thus addressed them—a silence which lasted for some minutes after he had done speaking. In times of common peril the tie between man and man is drawn very close; and loyal as all the Furnival dependants had ever been to their kindly master, they were more than ever zealous in his service at

the present crisis. Should that peaceful homestead require defending from the invader, there would be no lack of true-hearted men to lay down their lives ere the head of one of its inmates should fall.

And the master knew it, and felt that he was indeed rewarded for the gentle and kindly rule exercised these many years over those who resided upon his broad lands. Then Gilbert, catching some of the bashful yet warm-hearted murmurs which passed the lips of the unlettered hinds indicative of a loyalty and good-will they could not express as they would, sprang upon the great pile they had recently completed, and spoke of the coming crisis with an energy and natural eloquence which hushed his listeners into deep silence.

Gilbert had seen war and seen the Spaniards fight, so that he did not underrate their bravery or the horrors of what followed upon their conquering track. He had come home recently, unable to leave his family and home in peril when his sword might be wielded in their defence; and he spoke as only those can do who know the meaning of the words they use, and wish to bring them home to the hearts of their listeners.

And the gist of his speech was much what Barbara's had been—that it would be a thousandfold better to die to a man in defence of country and home and faith than to let peril or numbers daunt the heart, or false, deceitful promises delude the mind.

"The faith of Spain!" he cried in rising scorn. "Englishmen, do you know what that faith is like? I have seen

somewhat of it. What think you of the statesmen who will, with smiling face and smooth words, spend month after month in arranging long-drawn negotiations of peace —professing that peace, and peace alone, is the object of their desires, whilst all the time, when they are declaring that war was never farther from their thoughts, their arsenals are ringing with sound of hammer and anvil, their harbours full of vessels of war gathering and fitting for this long-planned invasion? Ay, and beyond all that, the Pope has entered into a league with the King of Spain; money has been furnished by him, and much more promised when the 'Invincible Armada,' as it is proudly called, lands upon our coasts; and in that league our country has been apportioned to the foreign invader. Our Queen is to be sent captive to Rome. Our brave sea-king, Sir Francis Drake, is to be seized and put to death; and the Inquisition is, above all things, to be planted on our land, that we may endure all the horrors which have devastated the Provinces over the waters, which are now bound together to shake off the detested yoke. *They* have tried times and again to put faith in the promises of Spain, and every time they have been monstrously and grossly deceived. With that example before our eyes, and with the stories of every form of cruelty and outrage ringing in our ears, shall any specious promise, any extremity of peril, induce us to make terms with such a foe? Nay, rather let us die to a man, sword in hand, and leave our fair homes a heap of smoking ruins, than let the foe place one foot upon the free soil of England, so long as one of its sons lives to protect it!"

A wild ringing cheer broke from the lips of all who stood by. Such counsel as that found its echo in every heart. High and low, rich and poor, all were of one mind, of one heart. The deep loyal patriotism which underlay the national character then, and always, was stirred to its very foundations. To repel the foe, or to die sword in hand in the effort to do so,—such was the task of every man in the kingdom. They felt it so, and none shrank or wavered.

The sun was beginning to sink in the sky as the little party wound down the hillside, silent, and moved by the thought of the task just accomplished and the words they had heard or spoken. It was a time of intense and vivid interest, and it left its mark upon all who entered into the spirit thereof. Moments of deep and wild excitement alternated with moods that were almost solemn in their earnestness and gravity; and the peril which evoked such loyal enthusiasm and national union, brought with it, too, something of trembling and awe.

Round the Manor-house all was animation and picturesque confusion. In the meadow just beyond the house home-made ale was being freely distributed amongst the bands of flushed and weary men, who had been, almost since noon that day, going through their martial exercises and drill in the heat of a midsummer sun. These troops—if they could be dignified by such a name—were composed of men of all sorts and conditions, drawn from the estates of Lord Courtland, Lord Beauchamp, and Mr. Furnival, and by their masters' joint-endeavours plainly but suffi-

ciently equipped. They were instructed in the method of warfare and the use of arms by the unremitting efforts of Viscount Lisle, Gilbert Furnival, and Lord Beauchamp, although the latter had never seen war, and was more versed in knightly exercises than in the sterner methods of real warfare.

He and Lisle, and some half-dozen of the gentry round (who were eager to give their assistance, and rode over to the muster each with a few followers), were grouped about the court-yard on horseback, discussing the events of the day, the latest news from the coast, or talking to the ladies who had come out to offer them refreshment and learn what progress had been made by the volunteer recruits. There was Ursula, tall and stately, with her step-children clustered about her, looking not so much older than when we saw her first, save that the matron's coif gave her something of added dignity and importance. She was glad to be with her mother during this season of anxiety, but she hoped to join her husband anon, when the danger should have passed; for she saw that this invasion must of necessity bind England and the Provinces faster together than had been the case formerly, and had little doubt of rejoining her lord when the crisis should be over.

Bess, looking very much her former self, was standing beside Lord Lisle, who, although entirely recovered, yet carried about with him a look of delicacy and fragility which hardly seemed in keeping with his warlike garb and martial air. Sir Ralph Fortescue was by his side, having been backwards and forwards between London and South-

ampton for some time now. He had been giving his assistance in the manœuvring of the troops that day, and had declared that there was no more gallant band of recruits to be found in the kingdom. And he was something of an authority, as he had been travelling from place to place much of late, stirring up the hearts of the people and seeing that all which might be done for the national defence was verily being accomplished.

"Will you not come in and rest?" said Bess, with a quick look at Lisle, as if to imply that it was for his benefit she made the suggestion. Sir Ralph glanced at his friend and dismounted, Lisle following his example; for his comrade had much to tell him, and he had to be off again to Romsey ere another hour had passed. In the shelter of the cool, dim hall, with its deep window-seats and embrasures, the soldiers could talk at ease; and they were not loath to partake of the refreshment offered them by Bess; whilst Mrs. Furnival came to welcome them both, to ask Lisle for the last news of his sister, and to smile a gentle reproof at the number of hours he had been in the saddle.

He laughed and disclaimed at this, saying his lameness was almost gone, and that he seldom felt the pressure of the stirrup now. He was certainly not fit to join the regular forces, which he might have felt called upon to do had there been no reason against it; and it was a relief in reality both to him and to others that he need not quit his home and his wife at such a time as the present.

Alianora, he said, was well. (Sir Ralph looked out of the window, but listened intently to every word which

passed.) She would have liked to come over to-day to see the muster of troops, but was detained by some duty at home. She, too, had caught some of the enthusiasm of war, and together with Constance was as busy as the day was long. Communication between the two houses had been rather interrupted of late, owing to the pressure of occupation and the need in the fields of all the horses that could be obtained, in order to get forward with the crops before the tug of war came.

As the talk drifted thus pleasantly along, the groups in meadow and court-yard broke up and dispersed. Honora came in to say good-night, and lifting her little son up to his father on his fine charger, she walked beside the pair along the green bridle-path which connected the two houses, telling her husband what they had been doing that afternoon, and what Barbara and Gilbert had said.

The little boy had his own version of the story to give his father, who listened with smiling attention, his face growing grave and earnest again as he turned it towards his wife.

"Ay, Honora, it is this same feeling which will make the safety of England in the coming struggle—the feeling that it is glorious and sweet to die for our country and her liberties sooner than yield one inch before the foe. It is that spirit calling the whole nation to arms which makes us independent of those great standing armies other lands have kept in readiness—which makes each man into a soldier when the time for action comes. And raw though our troops may be as compared to veterans of a hundred

battle-fields, they are yet not so untrained as the Spaniards believe. Hadst thou seen those good fellows to-day, I trow thou wouldst have marvelled, as I did, at their promptitude, their obedience, their address. We have not been working these eight years in vain—that the foe shall find us altogether defenceless. Our youths have been trained on the seas by the sea-rovers under whom they have fought; and on land we have not been altogether idle, as Spain shall learn one of these days if she succeeds in throwing her troops upon our shores. The fire of patriotism will prove, methinks, a match for the lust of conquest and the desire of vengeance."

And this was the feeling alike within the walls of castle, manor, and cottage. There was no room for fear in hearts alight with the fervour of patriotic enthusiasm. At the village inns—ever the centre of local interest—confusion to Spain was drunk in flowing cups of huff-cap, whilst a toast to her gracious Majesty was received with cheers that went nigh to take the roof off.

Each night, ere peasant or noble lay down to rest, he looked to the priming of his pistol, the sharpness of his weapon, and cast a glance in the direction of the nearest beacon-fire, wondering whether his rest that night would be disturbed by the glare of light in the sky which should tell of the approaching foe.

Whilst men toiled doubly hard in the field to get in such crops as were fit to be garnered, whilst they practised themselves in warlike exercises also, the women were not idle on their side; for no one could tell what demand might

not soon be made on household stores for linen, ointment, and medicaments for the wounded, and supplies of food for the brave soldiers defending the coasts against the attacks of these huge vessels.

There was no hanging back in the minds of any—no looking to the government alone to make provision for its soldiers. Every house in the land felt that its own safety depended on these brave defenders of their coasts, and made preparation accordingly; and had it been known on shore that the gallant little fleet was inadequately victualled, provisions would have come pouring in from private bounty which an overtaxed and close-fisted government even at this crisis denied.

And so the days passed on one by one, and the tense excitement which had prevailed earlier in the year, though not exactly abating, had become something of a habit of mind with the people; and still none knew whether the fleet was nigh at hand or whether another storm had overtaken it, and forced it back into port, as on the first occasion of its setting sail. There had been false alarms and floating rumours of all sorts; but the great beacon piles stood upon the hill-tops unlighted, and the watchers who guarded them had grown patient with the patience which comes of long delay.

It was a dark, still evening in July, the twentieth day of the month. Supper had been over for some time in the Manor-house, and lamps burned at the upper end of the room, where the master and mistress sat together with their two daughters and Sir Ralph Fortescue, who had

asked their hospitality for the night on one of his many journeys to the coast.

Outside the house the daylight still lingered, though a curtain of light cloud made the evening a dark one, and Gilbert and Barbara, always the restless members of the party, had slipped out into the garden, as was their fashion. The spinning-wheels hummed on pleasantly and peacefully. The talk, it is true, was of war and rumour of war; but everything had been said so many times before that it came with no sense of novelty.

All at once Sir Ralph lifted his head in a listening attitude, a soldier's instinct of alertness rousing him to the consciousness of some unwonted stir. Bess laid down her distaff, glanced out of the window near to which she was sitting, and suddenly rose to her feet, a deep flush rising in her face which faded almost instantly to the whiteness of intense excitement. But there was no time for her to speak, no time for a question to be asked. Through the open door came the sound of flying footsteps. Barbara was in their midst—Barbara with eyes alight, with streaming hair, with a face white as death, save for two glowing spots, one on either cheek. For a moment she tried to speak, and could not for the breathless haste with which she had flown; then with a quick, nervous motion of her hands she tore open the ruff at her throat, and with a sort of sob which told of excitement past all power of expression, she broke forth with her thrilling intelligence,—

"The beacon fire! the beacon fire! the beacon is alight!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE INVINCIBLE FOE.

WHAT a night that was! Did any person who lived through it ever forget its merest detail?

Out from the house rushed the whole company, and standing in the summer twilight, the dim calm of which seemed in such curious contrast to the tumult of human passions aroused, they turned their expectant eyes towards that long ridge of hills, upon the highest point of which blazed that fiery beacon.

What a beautiful and terrible sight it was! A huge pillar of lambent flame, rising up in its awful brightness till it seemed almost to reach the arc of heaven above, swaying gently to and fro in the light evening breeze, and carrying such dread import to the hearts of all gazers.

And even as they looked an answering flame shot up from the keep (as they knew) of Lord Courtland's castle, not five miles away; and beyond, and again beyond, those answering signals flashed forth through the gathering blackness of the night, carrying with them the message that fired every English heart and braced the nerves of the hardy people, thrilling them with a strange, fierce exulta-

tion and resolve, and sending forth the best and bravest to do or die—but to die sword in hand and face to foe for the honour of country and of Queen.

Wild with excitement, Barbara rushed headlong to the nearest eminence which might command a wide view over the surrounding country, and almost as she arrived she was joined by Honora and her husband, the latter of whom carried their little boy, who had been awakened from his sleep that he might be brought to see the sight.

"I want him to remember it," panted Honora, as she stood with Barbara's hand tightly clasped in hers. "England, methinks, hath never seen before such a night as this will be. O Barbara, Barbara, what will be the end of it? Seemeth it not to thee that these same fires are like messengers of dread import—heralds of a coming doom?"

"Say, rather, of a glorious victory—a victory which setteth the very heavens in a glow, and turneth night into day. See, see, how the flames go leaping from height to height! Saw ye ever the like before?—Ay, hold up the boy that he may see, good Beauchamp. Tell him that this is how England keepeth watch and ward in the hour of danger! She is not caught sleeping. Night or day she is ready. Hark! hear you not the trampling of men and horses? Here they come—the gallant hearts who know not fear; the brave bands who will muster all over the land in defence of house and home and liberty! Ay, give me the child, Beauchamp—thy work lies down there with them; but I must watch those fires yet. See, see how

they light the sky, till it looketh like a blood-red curtain! Do those proud Spaniards there on the deep see the great light which hangeth over our land? Methinks did they know what a fire was burning in each heart, they would even now turn their proud vessels homewards, and bid the sea carry them back to their own land."

And in truth it was a grand sight upon which the cousins looked as they stood in a little eager knot of gazers, watching the beacon fires which were blazing around, and seeing in imagination the fiery heralds leaping from height to height through the length and breadth of the land, rousing from their sleep those who had lain down with little thought of such awakening, yet ready for it when it came—rising without a thought of flinching or of fear; nay, rather with a wild enthusiasm of loyal courage, proud and glad that the suspense was over—that the call had come.

Inactivity became intolerable at last. The fires still blazed, but Barbara had gazed her fill. Turning away with a long-drawn breath, she helped Honora to carry home the now sleepy child, and then the two, unable to rest or remain quiet, slipped together across the fields to see what was being done in the court-yard of the Manor-house, which seemed alive with men and horses.

The intense excitement of that time can hardly be realized in these days, when the means of communication are so much more easy and rapid. That the Spanish ships were close at hand the warning beacons proclaimed, but what peril more might menace the land none durst venture to say. The intentions of the commander of that

fleet were absolutely unknown to the English. It might be his purpose, for all they knew to the contrary, to fling upon English soil an army of the pick of Spanish veterans so soon as they found a place of anchorage; in which case, if they succeeded in their attempt, any moment might bring the news that the foe was marching down upon these same peaceful homesteads. Women crowded together, looking out along the road, as if they expected each moment to see the gleaming of the steel head-pieces of mailed warriors; and although Sir Ralph Fortescue, and other gentlemen who knew more of the art of war, endeavoured to reassure the more timid, and explain that it would be impossible to accomplish disembarkation alone so quickly, even were it unopposed, there was still too much uncertainty for any one to venture upon forecasting confidently what was likely to happen,—and Barbara alone laughed to scorn such a notion as the one she heard propounded.

"What! the Spaniards land here? Why, good people, bethink you what you say. Ere they reach these coasts they will have to pass the Plymouth squadron lying waiting for them in that port. Think you that it will be child's play to run the gauntlet of our great sea-king Drake, to say nothing of Hawkins, Frobisher, Howard, and my good father himself? Why, shame on you for such base fears! Have not our good ships proved a match for the Spaniards times and enow, that we should fear for them at such an hour as this? Oh, would we were within sound of their guns! I trow they are even now bestowing on our guests such warm English welcome as shall teach

them a lesson in our national hospitality they will marvel to receive. Would that I were there to witness it! Nay, nay, sweet mother, why lookest thou so palely and wan? Art thou thinking of thy son Ivo, fighting beside our great vice-admiral, the noble Drake, ever where the battle is hottest, as is his wont to be? Nay, but methinks thou shouldest be glad and proud. Think of the name of his ship—the *Revenge!* Hath thy son naught to revenge upon these same haughty Spaniards? And thinkest thou not that he will bravely do it, when this glorious opportunity is his?"

It seemed as if Barbara's enthusiasm were infectious, for as she moved about from one group to the other, restless in her great excitement, and perfectly fearless in her absolute confidence in her country and its brave defenders, some portion of her spirit appeared to infuse itself into others. The men indeed, as they mustered in the meadow, ready at a moment's notice to march whithersoever they should be ordered, had from the first displayed the cool, quiet resolution and dogged, simple courage so characteristic of the mass of the English nation. It was amongst the women, the young lads, and the children that a species of panic prevailed; but confidence was given by the calmness and dauntless bearing of the gentry, who rode hither and thither getting their men into order, and discussing the next move. And when the early dawn of the summer's day dispersed the gathering shades of night, the sun shone upon a compact and disciplined little troop, and illuminated faces pale, perhaps, from sleepless excitement, but full of a high courage

and steadfast purpose, and without one unworthy doubt or fear.

And yet with morning light came a new source of alarm. Hardly had dawn fairly broken over the hills ere Lord Lisle came galloping down upon one of his mettlesome horses. His dusty and travel-stained appearance showed that he had ridden fast and far that night, and his face betrayed much exhaustion, although his voice was firm, and his bearing alert and active. He rode straight up to Mr. and Mrs. Furnival, who were on the steps of their house, watching with the utmost interest all that went on: there he reined up, and doffing his steel head-piece he said, hastily and in a low voice,—

"I would not needlessly alarm any of these good people," —with a quick glance round at the crowd gathered in the court-yard, comprising for the most part women and children,—"but it is said, with how much truth I know not, that the Prince of Parma hath effected a landing on the eastern coast, and is ere now in full march for London. The news was brought to Winchester scarce two hours ago. I was there consulting with the commander of the garrison, but on hearing these tidings I sped homewards with them. If it be true—and we cannot afford to despise warnings—we are menaced on both sides, and must needs take every precaution for safety. My father hath bidden me gather every woman and child and old person round within the walls of the castle. It is the only fortified building within a radius of many miles. I beg that you and yours will set the example, and come thither without delay. There is room

enough for all; and our good fellows will march all the more gladly to the defence of the coast, if they know that their wives and children are safely housed behind our thick stone ramparts."

Mr. and Mrs. Furnival exchanged glances. It seemed somewhat hard to leave their home at such a moment, and yet it was impossible not to see that if the peril menacing their country was as great as report said, it was the duty of all concerned to act in the way that should give greatest relief to those who were called to the service of defence. So near the coast as this place was, there could be no absolute security so long as the huge fleet was in the Channel; and the gallant little volunteer bands, setting forth to the defence of the coast, would certainly go with lighter hearts did they leave their wives and families behind in the greatest possible safety. If the foe had indeed landed on the other coast, there was no telling what the results might be. Mrs. Furnival spoke at once and with decision.

"We thank your good father for his kindness in thus thinking of those less securely guarded than himself, and we will gratefully crave his protection in this hour of menaced peril. It will be no small gain to be once again all beneath one roof. Hath Honora been told? I feel most fear for her and the child. If her husband goeth with his men, she will be quite alone."

"She is already on her way to the castle. The servants I brought with me have her in their charge. Beauchamp is mustering his men, and when we have seen all in safety, we march to Southampton to find how best we may act in

this time of peril. We shall learn the latest tidings and the truest there. Here every new-comer hath a different tale to tell. I thank you for your promise to go to the castle. I shall march with a lighter heart for knowing you all there, and Alianora and my wife will be far happier than they could be alone."

"We will lose no time; we will shortly set forth," said Mr. Furnival, who at once saw the prudence of the plan. "But surely, my lord, you purpose not to ride to Southampton yourself at the head of your troop? Methinks you would fall by the way an you attempted it. I pray you listen to sound counsel, and conduct us back to the castle in person, where you can obtain some measure of rest ere doing more. Our good guest, and your very good friend, Sir Ralph Fortescue, is here, and will gladly, I doubt not, take command of your troop. We shall need, if danger threaten, some commander versed in warfare within the walls of the castle itself; and who so fit for the post as yourself?"

Whether or not Lisle would have consented to forego the personal command of his men, had he been in a position to take it, may be doubted; but even as he opened his lips to assert his capability to bear all the needful fatigue, he reeled in the saddle from exhaustion, and was forced to dismount and rest awhile in the hall, whilst preparations for a speedy move into the castle were hastily set on foot.

Fortescue, hurrying in from seeing to the needful refreshment of the men before they marched, prevailed upon his friend to permit him to take his place. Although both

he and Lisle felt great doubts as to the correctness of the rumour set on foot with regard to Parma's landing, they felt that it was not the moment to neglect warnings, and that it was possible the country was in extreme peril. Therefore every reasonable precaution should certainly be taken; and it was as well that the castle should not be left without at least one person within its walls who had seen active service, and understood how to order a garrison and arrange a system of defence.

So Lisle consented to return with the women and others who were to shelter behind the walls of the fortress; and although it was something of a humiliation to him to discover himself still unfit for really active service and its attendant fatigues, still there was consolation in the fact that he would not have to leave his wife alone in anxiety and possible peril.

For the first moment Barbara heard with indignation of the proposed move, and seemed to think it a cowardly and unworthy one; but soon the fascination of picturing herself behind fortifications, repelling the attacks of the foe, overcame all other considerations, and she was as eager as any one to find herself in a situation which would give scope for her martial energies. Of course the garrison would be small—the greater part of the men were already on their way to the coast, where the most pressing need was expected. If the foe were to march upon the castle, should not she, like other women in such case, be ready with matchlock and sword to drive them back, and fling stones or boiling pitch or hot sand upon them. as women

had done in those desperate sieges in the States of which she had heard so much? She almost found it in her heart to wish she might have the chance of one such fling at the foe, the fire burning in her heart was so fierce and eager.

The procession was soon formed for the castle. Horses were somewhat scarce, for the demand had been great; but the ladies' light palfreys and the older beasts were still forthcoming, and the road was in good condition for travelling. Lisle mounted Ursula and one of her younger children upon his own horse, and insisted on walking beside her, although she said and thought that she was far better able to bear the fatigues of the walk than he. Barbara, with two more of the children dexterously fastened before and behind, rode with them, eagerly asking information as to the threatened danger, the resources of the castle to stand a siege, and the tactics of the kind of warfare of which he had seen so much.

And thus beguiling the way with stirring talk, the travellers toiled on through the summer heat, meeting on the way little troops of eager volunteers hurrying down to the coast, and picking up from one or another items of news, true or rumoured, but all tending to the belief that the peril to the country was extreme. Drake's squadron at Plymouth, it was said, though capable of doing much damage, could not engage the whole of that vast armament. If the Duke of Sidonia desired it, numbers of troops could be landed along the shores; whilst if it were true that Parma was effecting a landing elsewhere, no help could be looked for from the regular army or the Earl of Leicester's

levies in the midland counties. Every man would be called upon for the defence of London, and the southern counties would have to trust to their own resources for their salvation.

Lisle had sent an express up to London to ascertain the truth of these floating rumours; but there would be no possibility of any reply which could be relied on for twenty-four hours at the least, and meantime it behoved them to make all due preparation against the worst that could betide.

It seemed strange to the Furnivals to find themselves guests for the first time in their lives beneath the roof of Courtland Castle. They were, however, welcomed most courteously by their host. Alianora, who was looking strangely excited and exalted by the enthusiasm of the hour, embraced them again and again with a fervour unlike her wonted calm; and when she was able to secure their attention to herself, she led Ursula and Bess up a small winding stair to a lofty turret chamber, which she had lately fitted up for herself, and which commanded a wide view over a stretch of fair country, whilst far away on the horizon lay the glimmering line of the sea.

"Look," she cried, flinging wide the small casement, and stretching out her hand towards the blue streak, "that is the way that they will come, and Humphrey with them. They are bringing him back to me. I feel it—I know it. Do not bid me call it madness and folly; I am certain of it—I am certain."

"God grant you may be right," said Ursula; whilst Bess

stood gazing down at the curious formation of the fortifications, an excellent bird's-eye view of which could be obtained from this vantage-ground, wondering if haply it might be their lot to hear ere long the thunder of cannon at these same gates and walls, and to be holding the fortress for dear life against the foe.

It was a strange day that followed the sleepless night of tense excitement and expectation. Barbara made the round of the walls and fortifications with Lord Lisle, eagerly questioning him as to their capabilities of defence should matters come to a climax. It was hard to picture those fair gardens trodden down by the feet of ruthless soldiers, and otherwise devastated by the horrors of warfare. Sometimes the whole thing seemed like some dread nightmare, from which the sleeper must wake to find all a dream. Yet there was something in the grave watchfulness of the young soldier's pale face, in the hawk-like glance of the eyes, which had lost their dreaminess now, that told Barbara the danger was no dream. She listened to the quiet authority with which he issued his orders, studied the bearing of his words, and felt that she was learning each moment something of the peril which might menace them, as well as the means taken for protection; and when arms from the great armoury were distributed to the handful of men retained as the garrison, and the guns at the loopholes loaded in readiness, she felt a strange exaltation of spirit, as though indeed the long-looked-for hour was fast approaching.

Several rumours reached the castle during the course of

that long Saturday, but those who received the news knew not what value to place upon them. The strain of the long excitement was reacting upon all in a species of quiet calm hardly in keeping with the peril of the moment. Barbara, it is true, wandered hither and thither in the gathering dusk, making friends with the men at the loopholes, who were posted to give early intelligence of anything that might be going on without; but in the stately room where the others were gathered together no visible excitement prevailed. Ursula had known something of this watching and waiting for tidings of grave import, and her calmness infected the others. Mr. and Mrs. Furnival and the Earl talked together apart upon the all-absorbing topic of the hour, but without apparent excitement; whilst Lisle, worn out by the fatigues of the day and night he had just been through, lay sleeping on a low couch by his wife's side. He had learned the soldier's lesson of thus snatching repose whenever there came a moment's respite from duty, and he looked so wan and weary even in his sleep that all voices were lowered to a key which might not disturb his slumbers. As for Bess and Alianora, they sat apart with their heads close together, talking in low and earnest tones. Since Ursula's marriage and consequent absorption in other than home matters, Alianora had learned to make more of a confidante of Bess than she had done in old days. There was something in the quiet sympathy and simple good faith of Bess which never failed to inspire trust and affection; and although she might be the least gifted of the five girls brought up under Mrs. Furnival's care, she was per-

haps the one who would most have been missed had it been her lot to be taken early from her home. Whenever there had been perplexity or trouble amongst the rest, there had always been Bess to tell it to—Bess to give honest and friendly counsel, as well as sisterly sympathy; and as she sat now hand in hand with Alianora, listening with a strange eagerness to what she was saying, it was plain that the tale, whatever it were, was being poured into no inattentive or indifferent ears.

Evening deepened into night, and still there had been nothing to alarm the household. Lisle woke up and bid them all retire as usual. He had taken precautions against any surprises; and as the day had passed without confirmation of the rumour heard in Winchester, he began to doubt the actuality of the landing of Parma's soldiers. He thought if the rumour had been true, authentic information would have reached them ere now, and official warnings been transmitted throughout the land of the great and deadly peril at their very doors.

Sleep fell upon the household—the sleep which always follows extreme emotion and fatigue. The sunlight was bright in the sky, and the day many hours old, before the party reassembled, and then it was to ask the unavailing question as to what had passed in the night, and to learn that no certain tidings had come as yet. Lord Lisle had sent a trusty servant on the fleetest horse to inquire at Southampton what was known there, and if aught had been seen of the Spanish ships; but when he returned later in the day it was with no definite intelligence. Nothing had been seen

there of the great war-vessels; but a fast-sailing pinnace had passed by with letters for Sir Francis Walsingham, and the report was that the fleet was standing up Channel on an easterly course, and that the Plymouth squadron was hanging in the rear, inflicting damage on any ship that was left behind by its fellows.

Was it making for the port of Southampton? Was the "Golden Duke," as the Spanish commander-in-chief was nicknamed, intending to take advantage of the smooth waters of the Solent for disembarking his mass of troops? If so, was there power on sea or land to hinder him from his purpose? Again the fierce excitement of possible peril at their very gates blazed up in the hearts of those who listened to the tidings; and again Lisle patrolled the castle walls, looking anxiously to the defences of its weakest places, and feeling as if many lives precious to him might depend upon his skill and generalship.

"I would they would come—if they are coming," cried Barbara, in the restlessness of her impatience. "Anything is better than this terrible suspense."

There were others almost ready to echo her words as the slow hours of that strange Sunday wore away; but towards sundown there was a new excitement in the rapid approach of a dusty and jaded horseman, who was spurring towards the castle with all the speed he could get out of his weary horse. Barbara's quick eyes, which always saw farther than anybody's else, recognized the traveller whilst he was still far away, and she sprang up with a sharp cry of excitement.

"Ivo—it is Ivo!" she exclaimed, and followed by several others she dashed into the court-yard just as the porter was opening the great gate; whilst those behind exchanged wondering glances expressive of dismay, for it seemed to them that this headlong approach of Ivo boded little good to them.

Perhaps he divined their probable feelings, for as he rode through the gate and saw the anxious glances bent upon him, he waved his hat gaily in the air, and cried,—

"Good news, good news, good people! Look not so anxiously upon me. I am no bird of evil omen, but come charged with tidings which methinks will make all hearts glad."

"There hath been a great victory!" cried Barbara with flashing eyes. "I knew it, I knew it! I knew our brave soldiers would triumph over that proud foe. They have tasted English cheer, and are making their way discomfited back to their own land again."

"Nay, not yet that altogether," said Ivo, laughing. "But give me time, and I will tell my tale. Look well to the poor beast, I pray you, for he hath travelled far and carried me bravely; and give me, I pray you, a draught of wine. I have ridden from Plymouth this day, and have been fighting for four-and-twenty hours before that: wherefore I am something weary, and my throat is like a lime-kiln."

There were dozens of volunteers who flew to do his bidding. Food and wine appeared as if by magic, and fresh garments in lieu of those so stained and travel-worn.

Intense as the excitement was, the traveller was allowed to refresh himself ere he was called upon for his tale: it was enough for a short space to know that the tidings he brought were good.

"Ay, this invincible foe is proving himself but a sorry fellow on the seas," cried Ivo gaily, when at length he was able to satisfy the eager curiosity of those who stood round. "Let me tell you all from the beginning; and mind you, the struggle hath only just begun, and we must not crow too lustily, albeit I believe with all my heart that a glorious victory will be ours. 'Twas on Friday eve, as we were playing bowls on the green in Plymouth town, that a messenger came in all haste to tell us the Spanish fleet was in sight. Our captains listened to the news, and one of them said, 'Then there is an end of our game.' But Sir Francis Drake took up his bowl as calmly as if naught had happened—it was his turn to play—and said, 'We will finish the game first, and beat the Spaniard afterwards; there will be time enough for both.' And so they went to their sport again, as if no such thing as war were at hand!"

"'Twas like him, in good sooth," cried Barbara, clasping her hands. "But go on—go on—tell us more!"

"We took to our ships that same evening, and warped out of harbour. There were sixty vessels in all, and we stood out on a westerly tack, and at nine o'clock next morning we were face to face with the foe. I would you could have seen the sight they presented to us. Methinks it is one not soon to be forgotten. I trow there must be

nigh on a hundred and fifty huge vessels, more like floating towers than ships; and they sailed along in crescent form, the horns of which were seven miles, they say, asunder. Martial music came sounding over the water, and their flying flags and gallant show seemed rather as if they were sailing on in triumphal procession than with their victory to fight for. The Lord Admiral sent out a pinnace to the duke to challenge him to give the defiance, which he did by firing off his guns; and war being thus openly declared, the game began in earnest. Ah, I would ye had been there to see! It was a glorious sight! Those same huge floating castles lie like logs upon the water, and our little vessels run to and fro, firing off the guns into them as we list; whilst they are so unskilled that they cannot even depress their guns, and their shot goes flying over our heads. Their desire is to come to close quarters, where their weight and bulk will tell; but we know better than that, and sail round and round them, giving them our broadsides as we pass, but withholding battle at our will. Methinks they are in a sore maze of bewilderment at English seamanship. There stands the great duke in his shot-proof fortress on deck, surrounded by gallant soldiers, who on land would show their prowess, I doubt not, in no mean fashion. But there they stand helpless and discomfited, a mark for our gunners, but able to do naught in retaliation. We kept the weather-gage all that day, doing much damage, and receiving little hurt ourselves. And last evening fortune favoured us beyond our hopes; for a Flemish gunner, reprimanded by the Admiral Oquendo, set

light to the powder-magazine and blew up his ship. The sailors were taken off by their fellows, but the ship was abandoned, and was towed into harbour, where some treasure and some unexploded powder were found in her. Then a large galleon, commanded by the brave Don Pedro de Valdez, fell foul of some of her companions, and was so injured that she was left behind, with night and a rising sea overtaking her. Frobisher in the *Triumph* and Hawkins in the *Victory* set upon him, and attempted to make him surrender; but he would not yield, and night hid him awhile from their eyes. But with the dawn this day we in the *Revenge* sighted and fell upon him; and when Don Pedro heard that Drake was in command, he yielded to the great sea-king, knowing perchance that resistance was useless. He was taken on board, and treated with great courtesy, and there he remaineth yet. The ship held both treasure and powder—of which last we stood in sore need, for we are villanously badly provided for sharp fighting. And this brings me to the reason of my sudden appearance here. When our prize was taken into Plymouth, I was sent to make representation of our sore need of supplies both of food and ammunition. Yet, seeing how boats had been bringing supplies all day to the fleet, I had small hope of being able to do much there. But I knew, could I but reach these parts, that there would be no slackness here in relieving our necessities; wherefore my orders were to ride post-haste hither, that when the fleet passes this same harbour we may have boats in readiness to send on board the needful supplies."

"Ay, and that they shall have, and without stint," cried the Earl, whose purse was never closed to the cry of his country's need. "But how thinkest thou? Will these Spanish ships make no effort to land in these parts? We have been looking all this while to hear that they had flung ten thousand soldiers on our shores; wherefore we have gathered together here, to be the better prepared to resist."

"Ay, so I heard as I journeyed; but such is not the purpose of the armament. Its orders are to keep an easterly course, till in the Calais roads, or off the coast of Holland, they can effect a junction with Parma's forces, and act in concert with him."

"Then Parma hath not landed in England already?"

Ivo laughed in a sort of triumphant scorn.

"Parma is fast blocked in his dikes and ditches by the brave fleets of Holland and Zeeland; and methinks he will be a mighty fine fellow if he ever escape to sea. His Most Catholic Majesty, in giving him his orders to invade England, hath omitted one trifling matter—namely, that of transport. The Prince hath no ships, only the flat-bottomed boats, which would sink like logs were they sent to sea. Parma in England! I trow we shall never see him there. Our brave Dutch allies will look well to that.—Ursula, I have news of thy good husband. He brought us word himself of the Prince's captive and helpless state. Where there is fighting there must my Lord Willoughby be, and he, together with half a score other brave gentlemen from the Netherlands—Sir Robert Sidney amongst them, Barbara—

bore down upon us at dawn in a fast-sailing pinnace that eluded the enemy like a sea-bird; and I trow they will not return till they have seen the end of this same mighty armament, and have had one glance at certain loved faces they have left behind in England."

Barbara's face was in a glow; Ursula clasped her hands tightly together, and gazed at Ivo.

"My dear lord here? oh, would that I might see him!"

"If thou wilt be down on the coast of the Island two days hence—I reckon that will be the time when the fleets will pass—thou mayest even do so, methinks, by some good hap. At least, if I may see him when I join my ship, I will e'en tell him thou art there. And he tells me that this common peril hath so knit together the hearts of English and Netherlanders, that I trow he will take thee back with him when he returneth. He wearieth after thee when thou art absent; and in our good town of Flushing, where thou wast before, there would be no peril for thee now that Flemings and English are as one nation."

"Oh, would that I might be with him—near him again!" cried Ursula, forgetting public in private concerns for a moment, although all around Ivo's story was being passed from mouth to mouth, and eagerly discussed and canvassed. Ivo looked at her with a smile, and then at Barbara, who for once was silent, and seemed to have forgotten her martial enthusiasm in a nearer and warmer interest. She returned the glance, flushing and smiling, and asked eagerly:

"Hast thou seen Robert? Marry tell me of him! Did he not charge thee with some message for me?"

"Ay, that he did, sweet Barbara. He held a long and earnest talk with thy brave father, who is, as thou knowest, second in command on our good ship the *Revenge*. And when he heard my errand, and knew I was like to see thee face to face, he bid me be the bearer of many a tender message, the tenor of which thou canst better imagine than my unskilled tongue can speak. But the chiefest matter was this—namely, that thou hadst best prepare thy bridal farthingale (or whatever it may be called) in all good speed; for that if Lady Willoughby be coming back with her lord to the Netherlands, he will wed thee and take thee back with him thither so soon as this great fleet shall cease to menace our shores. Once let the power of Spain be broken, and there will be naught to fear for thee."

Barbara's face was in a glow; but she made no direct reply, only that the brightness of her eyes betrayed her gladness of heart.

"Good Ivo, thou speakest as if the defeat of this armament were sure and certain. But yet it is such a fleet as never sailed the seas before, and men's hearts fail them with fear at thought of it. May it not yet be that we shall feel its power? Dost thou not triumph too soon?"

But Ivo had all the confidence of youth and the spirit of our sailors, who had learned the most profound contempt for Spanish seamanship; and this contempt had not been lessened by twenty-four hours' experience of the helplessness of the unwieldy hulks in which the foe had thought to conquer England.

"Come hither, Barbara," he said, as he rose and ap-

proached a window that stood open to the summer night; "come, and I will tell thee why I speak thus confidently —boastfully it may be—of easy victory. Seest thou that light curtain of filmy cloud stretching away over the blue vault of heaven? Knowest thou that when we sailors see that sign we know that wind is coming? It may not be to-day or to-morrow, or the third day even; but yet it will surely come, and that ere a week has passed. And let but a good gale from these northern seas blow upon this mighty armament, and there will be little work for us to do in the matter of its destruction. The winds and the waves will make our task a light one. And Philip of Spain, in his cabinet at home, may have food for reflection as he learns the fate of his 'Invincible Armada;' I trow it will be long enow ere he sends another fleet to trouble these peaceful shores."

Barbara, as she listened to these confident words, and thought of the lover waiting to claim her so soon as the victory should be achieved, forgot her wish to meet the foe hand to hand, and longed only for assurance that he and his ships were far away.

And though the triumph was something premature, yet after Ivo's tale had once been heard, none of those who listened to it believed that they had any more to dread from the foe so close at hand.

The Spaniard was to learn that there was something yet more "invincible" than his own boasted might—namely, the fire of patriotism in loyal hearts, and the strife of the elements that obey a higher Will than that of man.

CHAPTER XXIV.

FROM THE DEAD.

THE intensity of the strain was over. The worst of the fear had passed. The great Armada was yet on the coast, but she was proving day by day her absolute inefficiency to grapple with her opponents. Triumphs to the English, disasters to Spain, were the results of each day's fighting. Men's hearts swelled with pride and patriotism, and fear was driven into the background by the foretaste of a great victory.

His Most Catholic Majesty had made his plans most excellently. In theory they were almost perfect; but he had made no allowance for possible failure in any one point. Could Parma have defied the Dutch seamen, and transported his troops across the Channel; could the Spanish ships have forced the English to give battle at close quarters, as they purposed, the result of the enterprise might have been vastly different. Philip, in his cabinet in the Escurial, had laid down his plans with sublime contempt of his foes. Nor had it occurred to him that the giving or refusing battle would rest entirely with his opponents; that the English ships could sail four knots to his vessels' one,

could play with them as a cat does with a mouse, shattering their huge sides with artillery, and sheering off in the very eye of the wind at will, only to come up again with another terrible raking broadside, and then fly off without permitting the enemy to come to the close quarters which alone gave him the faintest chance of victory.

This the Spanish admirals had to learn to their cost, and in their dismay and discomfiture they wrote imploring letters to the imprisoned Parma for lighter vessels that could grapple with the terrible English war-ships. But Parma was worse off than themselves, and could do nothing. The great fleet moved slowly on its way, ever hoping against hope for the victory which never came, and marvelling much at the courage and address of the foe, who ceaselessly hung upon their rear, harrying them without mercy, and capturing every vessel that lagged behind the main body. Whilst on shore, as the boats came in for ammunition and provisions, of which but such a niggardly supply had been bestowed by government, the hearts of the people beat high with pride and joy, and they gave bountifully what little they had to give, proud to be able thus to succour their bold sailors, whose daring and seamanship were saving the land from ruin and disgrace.

On the Thursday of that eventful week there was sharp fighting all day off the Isle of Wight, and many of the Furnivals were down on the shore, straining their eyes in the direction of those rolling clouds of smoke, and listening with beating hearts and fluttering pulses to the thunder of the guns, which told of conflict and death. It was hard to

be thus on shore, unable to see or understand what was happening; but the little boats plying to and fro, heedless of danger in the intense excitement of the hour, brought ever the same news—that the Spaniards were firing harmlessly over the heads of the English vessels, whilst our fire did deadly work upon the great hulks which formed so easy a mark.

Yet the gallant Frobisher was in some danger that day, having attacked the great *Santaña* and a galleon of Portugal, which were lagging somewhat behind. Other galleons came up to the rescue, and for a time Frobisher was surrounded and in considerable peril; but the Lord Admiral, Howard, seeing his position, bore down in his own flagship, the *Royal Ark*, to his assistance,—and the *Bear*, the *Elizabeth*, and other vessels coming to the rescue, the danger was quickly over. The two fleets were at closer quarters that day than on any previous occasion, and the excitement both there and on shore was intense. But Lord Howard was too good a general to allow the fighting to continue in such close proximity, and, greatly to the chagrin of the Spaniards, drew off to a safer distance; and the tide of battle drifted along past the cliffs of Blackgang and Freshwater, as we now call them, till the rolling clouds of smoke were all that remained to tell of the day's doings, and the boom of the guns died away into silence.

But the fever of war was in men's hearts, and inactivity seemed to have become impossible. Now that the danger at home no longer appeared imminent, and people could return to their own houses in safety, the attraction which

drew them again and again to the coast to learn the latest tidings, and to watch for the possible return of the vast armament, seemed ever to increase. Barbara and Ursula had private reasons for their longing for a glimpse of the gallant ships that had borne themselves so bravely in the fight; and day by day there were parties organized to ride down to the shore to learn all that was to be heard, and watch and wait in the hope of more certain intelligence.

Ivo's predicted storm had come. Rumours were flying through the country that the great Armada was beating an ignominious retreat, and flying to the North Sea, willing rather to encounter the fierce gales of those inclement latitudes than to run the gauntlet of the English fleet by retreating through the Channel. News had come of the panic in that fleet when the English fire-ships were sent amongst them, as they lay at anchor off Calais, hoping to entice the English to a regular battle, and watching for Parma to come out and join them—two vain hopes, destined never to be fulfilled. There had been some hot fighting off Gravelines later; but the Invincible Armada was no longer a thing of dread, and the hearts of loyal Englishmen beat high with exultation and pride. They had proved their vaunted supremacy on the sea; they had humbled their proud and overbearing foe; the long-looked-for attack had been made, and had signally failed, and England had gained in the eyes of the world a position which would render her safe and unassailable for many a long year to come.

But there was one face that brightened not as the days

passed by and the assurance of victory became doubly assured—one pair of eyes that looked seawards ever more wistfully and more sadly; one face that seemed rather to lose than to gather bloom as the country's salvation became firmly established. As Alianora rode beside her brother, together with Constance and Ursula, down to the coast one bright morning, barely a week from those perilous days which seemed to have been left so far behind now, there was nothing of exaltation in her mien, but rather a look of settled and hopeless sorrow, only too well understood by those who looked upon her. The wished-for day had come and gone. The ships of the Armada had approached their coasts, and had disappeared. It seemed to Alianora as if they had carried away with them her last fleeting hope. Now her life lay before her blank and colourless—doubly so from the fact of the confidence with which she had looked forward to the return of her lost love.

As she rode on with Ursula a little in advance, silent and dejected, yet with a feverish spot burning in either cheek, Lisle looked at his wife and said,—

"Methinks our good friend Fortescue's turn hath well-nigh come. The dream is passing fast, and can be little longer cherished; and when the sense of hope destroyed hath likewise passed in its turn, perchance she will find happiness and rest in the loyal love of another heart that beats only for her."

Constance looked up at her husband, a little smile in her eyes.

"Say you so, good my lord?" she asked, as if amused. "Nay, then, methinks the eyes of men are wondrous blind."

"Blind?" he echoed, glancing smilingly at his wife. "Nay, then, tell me what things thine eyes have seen to which mine are yet closed."

"I thought that thou didst see how from the first hearing of the long trouble which had shrouded our Alianora's later years, Sir Ralph began to yield up hopes of winning her. Perhaps love had made him know better her tenacity of nature than we; for albeit when they meet he is ever full of gentle and chivalrous courtesy towards her, it seemeth to me that it hath lacked the element of passion which was visible enow at the first. I have thought that since he knew her heart could never be truly his — that he must take only the second place there — he hath tried to conquer the love which he erst had cherished. And of late hast thou observed naught? It hath seemed to me that a common peril, binding all of us nigher together, hath wrought in him something of a special tenderness towards one who, if she can be won, hath the whole of a warm and true heart to give in return."

Lisle looked wonderingly at her. His own mind had been of late engrossed by such very different matters, that he had heeded little of the by-play which had not escaped the quick eyes of his wife. Constance laughed at his look, and said,—

"Nay, now, my good lord, hast thou had no time in this din of coming strife to see where our gallant Sir

Ralph's eyes have ever turned? I think I am no false prophet when I foretell that when this hour of peril is over we shall hear that good, true-hearted Bess is shortly to be made my Lady Fortescue."

Lisle's face expressed a lively surprise and satisfaction.

"Marry, if that be so he will get an excellent good wife, and one who will suit him far better than our dreamy, cloud-wrapped Alianora. I grieved for him even when I trusted that he might yet win her in wedlock; for to one who giveth all it is hard to receive but little in return. He hath done the wiser and manlier part in thus striving to root up and crush a love which could never be truly returned. And if he hath found the wound thus sweetly salved and cured, why, God speed his wooing, say I; for none who know her can fail to love good Mistress Bess, and to see in her a sweet and loyal helpmeet."

"Ay, and one more suited to thy soldier friend, as I well believe. He would have worshipped the very ground upon which Alianora stood, had she been persuaded to listen to his wooing; but as a wife and helpmeet to share his joys and sorrows and take a part in the interests of daily life, methinks he will find in Bess more the woman that he needeth. There are moments when I look at Alianora and say in my heart that she will but pine away and die, when the hope on which she hath built these many years now is ruthlessly plucked away and destroyed."

Lisle glanced at the drooping, fragile figure a hundred yards or so in advance, and shook his head with a short sigh.

"In truth it may well be so. She hath scarce held up her head since he left her, and looketh ever more and more like some pale lily, too fragile to stand the assault of the storm. My fair young sister, hers hath been but a sorrowful life; I misdoubt me if it might not be the happiest thing for her thus to slip away from a world that hath held so much of trouble for her."

After that the husband and wife rode silently onwards together. It was a sorrowful thing to be thus agreeing that Alianora's life-story had reached so sad a termination. They both loved her dearly, yet they had begun to think death rather than life the happier thing for her.

Their way down to the shore was somewhat rough. They had heard of a stretch of sandy coast near to the mouth of the Solent, where in the gale now raging along the shores of England pieces of wreckage were often drifted, and where it was possible some returning vessel might be stranded. The great fleet had been broken up by the gale, and was for the most part standing out to the North Sea, with Howard in hot pursuit. But there was the chance that stragglers might beat back along the Channel, so that the sailors and fishermen along the coast were keeping an eager look-out; and in the fury of hatred aroused in all hearts against the invading Spaniards, it was probable that any waifs and strays cast up upon the shore would receive summary vengeance at the hands of the outraged English.

It was partly with a view of checking any brutalities which the ignorant populace might think fit to inflict upon

any unfortunates flung on their coasts that the gentry within easy distance of the shores kept a certain watch and ward. Lisle had interposed only two days before to save a handful of miserable, half-drowned Spanish sailors from the fury of the fisher-folk; and as the party rode down to the sands this bright but squally morning, it seemed as if they had only just come in time to perform a like act of humanity in another quarter.

The spot was a very wild one. No houses were near, but only some score of wretched hovels belonging to a fierce and degraded tribe of people who lived by their nets, and also by such flotsam and jetsam as the waves brought to their doors. It was whispered that they would not hesitate to wreck a ship, could they do so undetected, in order that they might enrich themselves by her cargo. Humanity and mercy were but names to them; the virtues themselves were unknown and unpractised.

It was plain to the party as they rode over the rough sand-hills that an unwonted commotion was going forward upon the margin of the sea. A cluster of people was gathered around a tall figure which looked marvellously like a Spanish soldier, and from the howls and cries and the menacing gestures of the savage crew by whom he was surrounded, it was plain that his life was worth but a few moments' purchase were help not speedily forthcoming. And indeed had Lisle been the first on the spot he would have come too late to hinder the bloody deed; but it seemed that others had been before him. At a short distance from the crowd, watching the scene with breath-

less interest, were Bess and Barbara on their palfreys, guarded by Gilbert, who, with his hand upon the hilt of his sword, was keeping a close watch upon the movements of the excited savages (for the fisher-folk were little better); whilst in the very midst of the crowd, and close beside the tall figure of the Spaniard, stood Sir Ralph Fortescue, who had planted himself on horseback in front of the stranger, and seemed to be remonstrating with the angry crowd.

But apparently this remonstrance was likely to prove unavailing. The howls and fierce cries grew louder and louder. There was a sudden rush, and a hand-to-hand struggle seemed to take place. Sir Ralph's sword flashed suddenly in the sunlight, and then, before any one could dash to his assistance, a terrific blow from a club wielded by a gigantic fellow, a veritable and half-naked savage, caused the good arm to drop helplessly at his side. But the diversion had done this much—it had enabled the Spaniard (if such he was) to make a dash which freed him at once from the hands of his foes. It might have been that he had received some good counsel from Fortescue; but however that had been, he fled like a deer across the sand-hills, making straight for the party now rapidly riding down towards him, and when he reached Lisle he stopped suddenly, and in excellent English said,—

"Sir, I claim your protection, as an English subject, from the men who would destroy me, thinking me a Spaniard."

As he spoke he doffed his head-piece, displaying a noble

brow and a head of curly hair that had once been fair, though now from exposure to hot suns it had lost something of its golden hue. But a pair of honest English eyes looked out from beneath the straight thick brows—eyes blue as the waves of the sea, and looking all the bluer from contrast with the bronzed darkness of the cheek, which might well have belonged to a son of Spain.

Lisle started as he met that glance, and he thought that the fugitive started likewise. For one second the two men stood motionless, gazing at one another as if spell-bound. But there was no need for them to speak—no need for explanation to be asked or given. The sound of a quick, stifled cry, such a cry as is never heard save in moments of deep and thrilling emotion, broke from the white lips of Alianora. With a sudden bound she had sprung from her saddle, her startled palfrey galloping wildly off in his alarm, and with a wild, breathless cry of "Humphrey! Humphrey!" she flung herself into the arms of the stranger.

What a moment that was! Lisle, Constance, and Ursula stood for a time spell-bound and motionless, as if speech and thought alike were impossible. Then Ursula gave a quick, gasping cry, and dismounted with alacrity almost equal to Alianora's. The servants rode up in visible astonishment to take the horses, and the whole party crowded round the lost one in that strange tumult of astonishment which made the whole scene appear rather as a dream than a reality.

As for Humphrey, he stood perfectly still, holding

Alianora in his arms, and bending his head over her as she lay upon his breast; and when at last Lisle laid a hand upon his shoulder and asked, "Humphrey, good Humphrey, speak, I beseech thee, and say if it be veritably thyself in the flesh," he looked at the speaker with a species of dream-like bewilderment in his steady blue eyes, answering with a strange smile,—

"Nay, ask me not. I fear me it is all a fair dream. I have had too many such ere now. I pray thee waken me not."

But the smile was Humphrey's own, so was the voice, so were the eyes. Strange changes had been wrought upon that countenance in the seven years' absence, but there was no mistaking the stately height, the clear, unwavering glance, and the ring, the true Furnival ring, in the tones of the voice. Alianora raised not her head, only clung closer and ever closer, as if she feared some power would tear her away; but Ursula broke into a strange hoarse sob, and flung her arms about his neck.

"Humphrey—Humphrey—Humphrey!" she said, and broke into convulsive weeping.

Lisle felt a suspicious moisture rising in his eyes, and Constance's tears were stealing down her cheeks.

"Let us leave them awhile here together," he said in a low voice, "and pacify these poor savage folk by the gift of a few pieces of money, whilst we make them understand that it is no Spaniard against whom their hands were raised."

"Ay, let us. And we must see to thy good comrade there;

for I fear me, in rescuing Humphrey from their fury, he was something roughly handled himself. See, there is good Bess binding her scarf about his sword arm. Take one or two of the men with thee, Lisle, and bid those poor scowling fellows go to their homes. They mean no ill, but they are a wild and merciless crew. I would they were dispersed, and looked less threateningly at us."

Lisle smiled and rode forward to do his errand, which was quickly accomplished, for he had a charm of manner which won affection from all about him, as well as the quiet authority that never failed to impress itself upon those to whom it was addressed. His wife soon had the satisfaction of seeing the rough scowling faces change their expression; and as small pieces of money were distributed amongst them, they became friendly and harmless at once.

As for Sir Ralph, it was plain that he had come off somewhat the worse for the blow he had received. When Lord and Lady Lisle reached the other little group upon the sands, he had dismounted from his horse, and was submitting to such temporary tendance as Gilbert and Bess were able to bestow upon him. It was evident to Lisle at a glance that his arm had been badly broken, and he was in a good deal of pain, as his pale cheek and knitted brow showed; but he gave his comrade a quick glance of inquiry, and spoke to him in the Flemish tongue, which both of them knew tolerably well, although it was not comprehended by any other of the party save Gilbert.

"I can scarce credit what he said, but when I heard the

name I was resolved at all hazard to save him. What! it is so? Then may Heaven be praised! It is the very thing I have craved—to be able to give back to *her* her long-lost love, and to this sweet maid a brother."

"Nay now, what say you?" cried Gilbert with a sudden start—a start that caused Fortescue a thrill of pain, and made Bess give him a reproachful glance.

"Nay, brother, an thou art no better surgeon than that, let me, I pray thee, have charge of this poor arm. What is it you are all saying? Humphrey! what no—it cannot be! Humphrey? why, it was no Englishman but a Spanish soldier whom Sir Ralph rescued from their fury. Oh, good Sir Ralph, I prithee tell me all. What is it that hath chanced? Methinks I am in a dream."

And indeed this was not strange, for a confused babel of tongues had suddenly arisen, and in a moment Bess found herself left alone with Sir Ralph upon the shore. Barbara and Gilbert had dashed off at full speed along the sands, and Lisle and his wife had followed, as if infected by the same overmastering excitement, so that she and her injured knight were left alone together.

"It is true indeed, I trust and hope. Yon Spaniard, as we all took him for, is none other, I trow, than thy long-lost brother. He spoke to me in such English as cometh not from alien lips; but for a moment I knew not, guessed not who it was, and the savage folks, who deemed he did but desire to deceive them, howled and raged the more wildly when he proclaimed himself a countryman. I asked his name, and when the answer came, 'Humphrey Furnival,'

then I did indeed believe that I dreamed. It was this space of amaze which cost me my arm, for they closed round so fiercely, seeing my surprise, which they doubtless took for dismay, that had I not seen Lisle's approach, and bidden him fly for his life whilst I cut him a passage through, methinks he would then and there have been brained. I knew not if to credit his tale, but Lisle would judge of that. And so—"

"And so the blow aimed at our brother fell upon thee, and thou hast saved him for us at thine own peril?" cried Bess, her eyes full of tears. "Ah, how can we ever thank thee enough for what thou hast done this day?"

"Nay, an thou talkest of rewards, sweet mistress, thou puttest temptation in my way. I could ask a large one at thy hands, feared I not to advantage myself at thy expense. But linger not here with me, I pray. Thou art surely pining to fly to thy brother's side. A soldier is used to giving and taking hard knocks, but such soft tendance is grace he meets not often."

"Nay, I cannot leave thee till I have bound thine arm and eased it of the worst of its pain. If thou wouldst stoop I could make shift to tie this scarf and give it support; but I fear I am a poor surgeon, and I would not give thee needless pain."

"Nay, that thou canst not do, for the touch of thy hands alone soothes it all away. I have heard it said ere now by some that the smart of wounds was not felt when they were tended by hands like these. Methinks I credited it not in those days, but I understand it well now. Sweet

Mistress Bess, if I have helped to give thy mother back her son, what will she say if I ask her, as my reward, to let me rob her of a daughter?"

Bess stood before him with glowing cheeks, and eyes that were still soft and steady, though the strange tumult of the moment was great. She looked into his face, and then she let him draw her towards him. For a moment even Humphrey's strange resurrection passed into the background of their minds, though it would not be true to say it was forgotten. Their eyes met in a glance which spoke the perfection of mutual trust, and Bess answered very gently,—

"I do not think she would say thee nay."

A few moments later and the group around Humphrey was augmented by Bess and Sir Ralph; and after embracing his sister with tender affection, the bronzed traveller turned and held out his hand to the man who had been the means of rescuing him from dire peril. The bandaged arm in the sling told its own tale, and Humphrey said quickly,—

"I fear me thou hast got that stroke in my service, good sir. Had it not been for thy prompt succour, I had never escaped with my life from their hands. I had been forced to throw away all my arms that I might swim the better. When I landed exhausted and helpless, I should have fallen but an easy prey to their fury, had it not been for the promptitude with which thou camest to my rescue."

"I have bought my hurt cheap," answered Fortescue, who looked marvellous well content notwithstanding his broken bones; and a horse being provided for Humphrey,

the little *cortége* wound its way back among the low sand-hills and leafy lanes—Humphrey and Alianora leading the way side by side, the rest following and talking in breathless undertones together, but feeling that for the first hour at least those two faithful hearts should be left to commune together undisturbed.

"Methinks I will ride forward and prepare the mother for the meeting," said Barbara, as they neared the familiar homestead; and Humphrey, with straining eyes, gazed upon the familiar landmarks, only answering by a strange smile when bidden to look here or there, or asked if he remembered this or that. In truth he dared not trust his voice. His hand trembled as he laid it upon Ursula's, and the silence of emotion too deep for words fell upon them all.

Lord and Lady Lisle quietly detached themselves from the others, and took the homeward road alone; but Alianora was left to be the one to present the long-lost son to his mother. Gilbert and Barbara had ridden on in advance. Bess and Fortescue had dropped behind, as he was unable to ride rapidly without severe suffering; and it was Humphrey, Ursula, and Alianora alone who rode side by side under the leafy avenue which led to the house.

A tall figure suddenly appeared at the farther end. It advanced a few steps and then remained stationary. A single word broke from Humphrey's lips.

"Mother!" he said in stifled accents, and flung himself from his saddle. He was on his knees at her feet. She had gathered him in her arms. No one spoke—no one tried to speak. A deep sob broke once from the lips of

the strong man, and then all again was still. Ursula's tears rained down, but Alianora's eyes were dry. She too slipped from her saddle and came and knelt beside Humphrey, to be gathered into the same close embrace.

"I said he would come home, mother—my mother!" she said.

"My son—my daughter! God be thanked for this hour."

That was all. For many long minutes they stood thus together, and then the spell was broken by the firm, hasty step of another who approached. Humphrey sprang to his feet, only to bend his knee for his father's blessing; and if the words were few and hoarse and broken, it was not that the intense and heartfelt gratitude of that hour was lacking.

"Methinks it is all a fevered dream, and that I have never been away. Can it be that all hath remained thus unchanged, whilst I have been seeing such strange new sights, as if I were the denizen of another world? I can scarce credit my senses."

Thus spoke Humphrey as he sat in his old place at the long table in the familiar hall. The intense strain of the past hours had passed, and a sort of settled calm had stolen over all. Humphrey had wandered over the old homestead, with Alianora's hand in his, as in the days of their childhood. He had been taken by his mother to the familiar room he used to occupy of old, and he had heard the story of what had passed at home since he had left seven long years ago.

He had not yet told his own tale. He was in too great a maze of happiness for consecutive thought to be possible to him, and presently the exhaustion following upon shipwreck and strong emotion had overcome him, and he had slept soundly for many hours, whilst mother and sister watched beside him. Now he was at his old place at the supper-table, and the light of an August evening was streaming in at the mullioned windows. He had donned the familiar garments his mother had never parted with, in which he had been wont to clothe himself when he pursued the homely duties of a farmer. Save for the deep bronze of his skin, the darkening of his hair, and the lines which had been traced in his face by the experiences of the past years, it might have been the old Humphrey once more in their midst. They were eager now for his story, and the tale was listened to with bated breath and keenest interest, though it may be given here in brief without the questions, comments, and explanations which made the narrative lengthen out till darkness had stolen into the great hall.

Humphrey, when taken prisoner by the Spanish vessel his uncle was gallantly trying to board, had been wounded so desperately that his life seemed to hang on a thread; and when the vessel put into port he was first sent into hospital, and afterwards drafted off to the galleys with a number of other prisoners who were wanted for the fleet ever waging war against the Turks. For one long year he was chained to the oar, suffering all the miseries of an existence which made him long for death. But there were better

days in store for him. It was his lot to be in a galley commanded by a gallant Spanish gentleman, one Don Rodrigo de Escovedo, who was somewhat more humane than most in the treatment of the slaves in his galley. He soon noted the noble bearing and splendid physique of the young Englishman, and occasionally spoke a friendly word to him. One day it was the hap of this vessel to be separated from her companions in a gale of wind, and to find herself quite alone, and threatened by a large and well-manned Turkish barque, which was bearing down with intent to capture her. The commander descended amongst the slaves, and asked which amongst them would fight were liberty to do so accorded. Humphrey was, of course, one amongst those who eagerly volunteered, and the overseers made no objection to easing him of his fetters, seeing that his conduct had always been excellent.

And Humphrey, rejoicing in his freedom, and feeling that death would be preferable to life as a galley-slave, fought with such desperate valour that the success of the day was in a great measure attributed to his intrepidity. He had the good fortune to be instrumental in saving the life of Don Rodrigo himself; and although he had received many wounds in the course of the action, none of them were dangerous, and he was taken to the commander's own cabin to be tended, and was moreover released for ever from the oar. Valour in fight and personal daring were never lost upon the Spaniards. Don Rodrigo took a great liking to the brave young Englishman, and offered him his liberty if he would pass his word of honour not to attempt escape, but

serve beneath the Spanish flag against the Turks, as one of his own followers.

It was rather hard to give such a pledge; the hope of escape was so tantalizing and so sweet. But the choice lay between that and the horrible life of slavery at the oar; and Humphrey had learned enough of the Spaniards to have lost some of his fierce national hatred of them. There were brave and noble gentlemen amongst them, as in all other nations, and for Don Rodrigo himself he felt the warmest admiration and even affection. So after brief hesitation he gave the required pledge, only stipulating that it should last only so long as war against his own nation were not declared. Should Spain and England come to open warfare, he would promise nothing. The Don had liked him none the less for his patriotism and courage. War between the two nations was not imminent then. Don Rodrigo did not believe Philip would ever make up his mind to declare it, and he accepted the condition willingly. Five years passed rapidly away in a life of peril and adventure. For the most part Humphrey had remained in the Mediterranean, cruising about those summer seas, and keeping the power of the Turks in check; but he had crossed the Atlantic more than once, and had brought treasure home from the Spanish Indies. Sorely tempted he had been at times to break his plighted word, and steal off to some home-bound vessel spreading her white wings for the dear old country. But Humphrey was nothing if not loyal and true, and he resisted the temptation manfully. It was only when the burst of ordnance from the

Golden Duke's ship proclaimed that war had been declared—only ten days ago—that he was released from his pledge, and by that time his comrades in arms had forgotten even the fact that he was an English subject. He had won a reputation of his own for bravery, but never spoke of himself; and though his heart was in a strange tumult as he sailed past the familiar shores of old England, none knew how fast it beat, or what feelings were passing through his mind, as he stood calmly watching the fighting in which for the present he had no share.

His time seemed long in coming, but it came at last. In the confusion attending the disaster off Calais, and the storm which shattered the fleet and dispersed it hither and thither, he got on board a small galliass, and advised the crew to beat back along the Channel, according to his direction, rather than hazard themselves in the North Sea, with the enemy in hot pursuit. As the little vessel was somewhat crippled, and found it impossible to keep up with the rest of the ships, his counsel was followed, and by his knowledge of the coast he was able to direct her course successfully until, on the previous evening, she had stood off the Isle of Wight. Then taking advantage of the darkness of the night and the squally weather, he had contrived to cut adrift a small boat and swim out to her, and in this perilous fashion had reached the shore at dawn. It would have cost him his life at once to have spoken of his purpose to any soul on board the galliass. He had to slip off unobserved in the dark; and yet when he found himself drifting upon the sandy flats of the Solent, it seemed for a

moment as if he had but exchanged one death for another. Sir Ralph's timely appearance had, however, saved him from the fury of the wild fisher-folk there; and here he was at last telling his strange story of adventure in the peaceful security of his own home.

"And thou hast been faithful to my memory all these years, dear love?" he said, turning to Alianora, who seemed to hang upon his every word. "I dared not think I might find thee yet unwed. It seemed too much to dream of, when all but *thy* faithful heart must have long since given me up for dead. And methinks thou mightest have wed to wealth and fame and honour; whilst I shall be a poor man ever, with naught but a humble name to give thee."

"Nay, not so very poor, good Humphrey," cried Barbara, springing to her feet, whilst Alianora's eyes gave her eloquent response. "For, look you, I will speak now, though I never had the heart to do so whilst all thought thee dead. My good father hath kept intact thy share of the spoil which was made on that voyage when thou wast taken captive. He hath it safe for thee. He ever said it was not his, and he would not make shift to give it even to thy parents, lest haply thou shouldest return to claim it. So thou wilt find thou hast a fortune of thine own, as well as thy position as thy good father's eldest son. Methinks sweet Alianora will not chide thee, bring thou what thou mayest to lay at her feet. But if her Majesty bestow not knighthood on thee when she hears thy tale, beshrew me for a foolish wench, who speaketh of what she understandeth not."

"And be thou knight, or be thou but a simple esquire like thy good father, my very true and trusted friend, thou shalt have the hand of my daughter in wedlock, and her father's blessing with her."

The whole party started at sound of these words, to see that the Earl of Courtland and his son were standing in their midst, having entered unseen whilst these words were passing.

"Ay, Alianora, I know all now, and I chide thee not for that same faithful love, which shall be so richly rewarded. Nay, I know not how thou canst more worthily mate than with the son of this house; and I am proud and glad to think that I may likewise call him son of mine. Come hither, my children, and take my blessing. Such loyal love as yours has been deserves its true reward."

The young couple needed no second bidding, and kneeling hand in hand at the Earl's feet, received his fatherly blessing. Lisle stood looking on with a happy light in his soft eyes. He turned to Mrs. Furnival at last, and taking her hand in his he said,—

"I ever feel that I have owed my happiness, my wife, and life itself, to thee and thine: it is fitting that my sweet sister should say the same. Thou hast been the tenderest of mothers to her in her helpless childhood, and now thou hast given her the right to call thee mother still, through the loyal and true love that hath ever linked her heart with that of thy noble son."

And in this manner ended that strange bright day in which Humphrey came back from the dead.

CHAPTER XXV.

GOOD QUEEN BESS.

JOY-BELLS were ringing, bonfires blazing, thanksgiving services being celebrated in every church along the road, as a band of travellers from the south coast took their leisurely journey to London, in order that some amongst them might be present to celebrate the Queen's birthday (which was to be kept as a day of public rejoicing throughout the kingdom) in her favourite palace of Greenwich, and to accompany her on the following Sunday to St. Paul's, where a magnificent national Thanksgiving service was to be held, to celebrate the splendid triumph achieved.

It was just the sort of occasion which tempted hundreds and thousands to leave their homes and come flocking to the great city, which ever seems the centre of rejoicing on such occasions. Mr. Furnival had persuaded his wife, for the first time for many years, to leave the quiet seclusion of her country home to enjoy the brave sights of London; and the good matron was the more ready to be persuaded now on account of the many gaps just made in the dear home circle.

For these weeks of August which were now waning had been full of incident for the Manor-house party. Lord Willoughby had come down post-haste to carry away with him on his return to the Netherlands his wife and younger children; whilst Sidney had claimed his promised wife, and had received her at her father's hands, the more willingly that she had her cousin as her companion in travel. Then Fortescue, not willing to be outdone, had spoken so manfully of his love for Bess, and his desire to wed her quickly, that he had gained his own way in that matter. It was hard, indeed, for the parents to deny any request made by the man who had been instrumental in saving Humphrey's life and restoring him to his home. So Bess and Barbara had been wedded on the same day—the one to go to Flanders in the train of Lord and Lady Willoughby, the other to reside in London for the most part, but with wealth and liberty to come and go at will whenever their fancy prompted them.

Then as Humphrey was about to return home with his bride so soon as he should be wed, both Gilbert and Ivo desired and obtained their parents' leave to return to the respective services which had grown so dear to both. Gilbert took his brother's old post as one of the esquires of Lord Willoughby, whilst Ivo returned to the sea-service which had proved so full of satisfaction and glory.

And with a household thus diminished at home, it was small wonder that the mother felt she could well contrive to leave it for a while. Humphrey's return, and the sense of freedom and relief which was filling all hearts when the

great Armada had dispersed, went far to reconcile her to all these changes. But no one likes the silence of an empty house after it has been full of the gay bustle of active preparation; or empty chairs round a table that has been hitherto plentifully furnished with guests. So that the journey to London was welcomed by all; and the party who rode leisurely along in the cool freshness of the first days of September showed, by smiling faces and happy voices, that they were in tune with the rejoicings which greeted them on every hand.

Lord Courtland and Mr. Furnival rode one on each side of the wife of the latter, vying with each other in pointing out objects of interest by the way, and securing for her all possible ease and comfort in the journey. The Earl and his son were going to Court as a matter of course, to offer in person their congratulations to her Majesty; and Constance was to make her first appearance there in the character of the Viscountess Lisle. She had by this time grown so well used to her position, and her beauty and natural grace of manner had attracted so much admiration for her on all occasions when there had been guests of the Earl staying at the castle, that she had ceased to feel the least dread of the ordeal before her. If she pleased her husband and father-in-law, she cared little for the applause or the criticism of the world. As a matter of fact, the fame of the beautiful viscountess had been so spread abroad by Fortescue and others who had made acquaintance with her, and the romantic story of Lisle's hasty marriage had roused so much interest amongst Court

gallants and ladies, that Constance's appearance there was almost certain to be a success. But public events had so stirred the hearts of all classes of men of late that there was less room for private matters to obtrude themselves; and Constance's thoughts were little concerned with her own affairs—she had too much sympathy and interest in those of others.

As for Humphrey and Alianora, this journey was like a dream of happiness to them, as they rode side by side through the pleasant leafy lanes, none interposing to disturb their absorption in each other, none frowning on that faithful love now reaping such a rich reward. They communed together of all that was in their hearts. She learned from him each detail of those long years which now seemed but as the black vision of a night of sorrow. She had her own tale to tell of trouble and aching pain; but it was hard now to recall those hours of hopeless watching and waiting, the sunshine on their present path being now so bright.

The merchant West met the little procession as it neared the city, and Mr. and Mrs. Furnival and Humphrey were conducted by him to his own comfortable and luxurious house in the Fleet. It seemed strange to Constance to pass her old home by; but Lady Lisle must to her husband's mansion upon the river, nigh to Westminster, from thence on the morrow to proceed to Greenwich, the favourite residence of the Queen, where she always liked to spend her birthday, perhaps in memory of its having been her birthplace. Alianora, however, was left under

her aunt's care at the house of the merchant. She was no longer one of the Queen's ladies, and there seemed no reason why her earnest prayer to be left behind should not be granted. Since Humphrey's return her cheek had gained some of its lost bloom, and her dark, dreamy eyes had lighted with a wonderful new brightness. Fragile and ethereal she still looked—she might never altogether lose that old characteristic of hers—but she no longer seemed as one whom a rough breath may blow away. Happiness and a great and settled peace had descended upon her, and the anxious, wistful longing had disappeared. Those who loved her best had no wish to do aught to disturb this newly-found happiness. If she desired the obscurity of a lowly lot, none would say her nay.

Two—three happy days flew by. It seemed as if the joy within was but a reflex of the ceaseless rejoicing without. The Queen's birthday, which was a Friday, was celebrated with such ringing of bells, such bonfires, such shows, as had scarce been seen before even in loyal London. The streets were hung with blue cloth, in honour of the navy, and the flags and colours captured from the Spaniards were spread abroad for all loyal folks to see. Humphrey and Alianora made a round of some of the most gallant sights early in the day, and then remained watching what went on from the safe shelter of the merchant's window overlooking the street. It was growing dusk on the evening of that same day, when Alianora suddenly started up exclaiming, "My brother—my brother! here is Lisle riding up to the door!"

A few minutes later and the viscount was with them, exchanging greetings hastily with the whole party, who had gathered to meet him.

"My time is short," he said: "I must take boat back to the palace with all speed; for there is high revelry there to-night, and I have a part to play. But I could not forbear to bring the news myself. Humphrey, and you too, my sister, are to have audience of the Queen to-morrow. Methinks you owe it in part to the silver-sweet speech of my wife, though in part to her gracious Majesty's marvellous memory, and to the triumph of the hour, which gladdens and softens all hearts. The welcome we all received was most gracious and loving; and my Constance was favoured beyond my utmost hopes. The Queen kept her long beside her, bidding her talk to her and tell her many things. And she with her sweet tact and grace told thy story, good Humphrey, among other matters; and so marvellous powerful were her words, that not her Majesty alone, but all who stood by, seemed to hang upon the tale with bated breath; and when it was concluded, naught would satisfy her Grace but that she must see thee, and learn thy perils from thine own lips. And the story of your faithful loves was so cunningly interwoven with the rest, that the Queen smiled her sweetest as she bid us fetch the maiden likewise to her. She laughed as she told her ladies how that thou, Alianora, hadst refused the throne of an Emperor; and Constance said as how the throne in the heart of a simple esquire was all that thou didst covet.

"'An esquire, quotha?' returned her Grace; 'methinks the daughter of my Lord Courtland deserveth somewhat more than that for her years of faithful waiting—to say naught of the youth's own merits.—What say you, my lords and ladies?'

"So, good Humphrey, it would be no such strange thing if the words of our tricksy elf Mistress Barbara—I crave her pardon; I should say my Lady Sidney—should to-morrow fulfil themselves. I speak not from any certainty, but I saw by the look in the royal eyes that favour was meant you twain. Therefore be prepared. And I wish you all happiness and success."

Lisle was off again before they had well digested his news, but that Humphrey and Alianora were to appear before the Queen on the morrow was well understood; and before noon the following day the viscount was there again, in all the gay gallantry of his Court dress, to escort his sister and her lover by barge to the palace of Greenwich.

He looked Humphrey over with a glance of approval, and in truth the soldier bore inspection well. His dress had been provided for him by his uncle, and was exactly befitting his rank in life and the occasion upon which he was to appear. It was at once very plain and yet very rich, but without the least ostentation—such a dress as best set off the splendid proportions of his figure, the graceful symmetry of his limbs, and the majestic height which gave him so much simple dignity.

As for Alianora, she was clad in such fashion as became the daughter of a wealthy earl, and excitement had given

such a glow to her cheek and such lustre to her eyes as made her wonderfully lovely to behold. Lisle regarded them both with pardonable pride; and telling Alianora that her father was awaiting her in the barge, he hurried them away,—for he was eager that the audience should be favourably over, and had high hopes of a successful termination to it.

It was with no great state or pomp that the young couple were received. The Queen was in one of her own private chambers, surrounded by some dozen of her courtiers and ladies, when word came that she required the presence of Humphrey Furnival and his betrothed. Alianora knew the room well; she had often been one of the attendant group which stood behind her Majesty's canopied chair. But as she bent low to-day before the feet of royalty, the Queen's keen eyes rested more gently upon her than they had ever done in days gone by; and if the face of the maiden sovereign had lost something of its early bloom and smoothness, at least it had gained in kindliness and good-will.

She gave her hand in turn to each of the kneeling pair, and tapped Alianora playfully upon the cheek, making the girl look up to meet her keen yet kindly gaze.

"And so, child," she said smiling, "thou hast found an emperor at last more to thine own liking? Why didst not tell us thine heart was pledged when we were bidding thee look elsewhere?"

"Ah, gracious Madam, the world did deem him dead—or worse. They would but have called it folly and mad-

ness to have waited for his return. Wherefore I held my peace."

"And broke thy heart in silence, brooding and waiting? Well, it seemeth that thou hast mended it to some purpose now. And when thou art wed to this same gallant lover of thine, where purpose ye to dwell? Art thou to forget thine own rank, and sink thyself to thy husband's level?"

"Nay, Madam, 'twould be no sinking but rather a rising to reach that," answered Alianora, with the boldness of a great and proud love. "But I am thankful beyond all power of words that I may e'en go home with him, to pass my days beneath that peaceful roof which hath sheltered me in my childhood. The world hath but one home for me; and it is to that home we shall return—even the house of his father and mother, who are dear as parents to me. The other sons and daughters have married and gone forth into the world. They will have naught but us twain left; and I trow that we shall never wish to leave them or the sweet home which we both love so well."

The Queen smiled half sadly as she again patted the girl's face.

"Thou art a simple maiden in all sooth. Thou art better fitted for such a life than for the imperial state thou didst reject. And we prize too well our good subjects, who have answered so nobly to their country's call, to scorn the lot thou hast chosen for thyself.—And now, young sir, thou hast been through great perils and adventures. We would hear of them from thine own lips. A

story such as thine will bear a repetition. Speak, good youth, and tell us all."

And Humphrey, still kneeling on one knee at the Queen's feet, told all his tale, with the ease and force that come with frequent repetition. He had grown perforce to be something of an orator during these past weeks, when every soul he met desired to hear his story, and when Alianora drew from him detail after detail during the long hours spent alone together. So he was able to speak with graphic power, and the Queen and those who stood about her listened spell-bound and delighted. Various items of really valuable State intelligence were picked up here and there; and the romantic finish to his adventures, in his rescue by Fortescue and Lisle from the hands of his own countrymen, seemed to put a fitting climax to the narrative. The Queen looked round as he finished, and said to those who stood by,—

"Methinks we must e'en reward with our own hands the hero of so romantic a story. What say you, gentlemen? Shall these loyal hearts receive naught of us? Is their own love enough? or shall we add another grace to their happiness?"

There was a sort of murmur from those who stood by, indicative of assent to this proposition; and the Queen, turning to the viscount, who stood watching the scene with smiling countenance, held out her hand towards him with an answering smile.

"Your sword, my Lord Lisle," she said.

Lisle presented it upon his knee, then rose and drew

back once again. Humphrey was still kneeling as before. The Queen lightly laid the flat of the shining weapon upon his shoulder.

"Arise, Sir Humphrey Furnival," she said; and as the newly-made knight first obeyed her command, and then bent low before her to kiss the gracious hand extended to him, she added, with something between a smile and a sigh,—

"We would that throughout the length and breadth of the land we might look for subjects as loyal and true as thou and thine have ever proved themselves in peace and war."

As the gaily-decked barge conveyed back, up the sparkling river, Sir Humphrey Furnival and his betrothed wife, they sat together, somewhat apart from the rest of the merry company, looking out over the broad waters, and exchanging a close hand-clasp which seemed more eloquent than words. A settled peace and calm was in Alianora's face, a sort of proud and tender exultation in that of her lover. At last their eyes met, and he put his arm about her and bent his face to hers.

"Sweetheart, methinks such hours as these atone for all that hath gone before. May it not be perchance that we are all the fitter to face life and its joys and sorrows for the years of trial that have been lived through?"

She looked up with a strange sweetness in her luminous glance.

"Dear love," she said, "I think no trial can be called

hard that leaveth us yet our love and faith in one another. Had I doubted thee I must have died. But I knew that wherever thou wast, thou wast true to me; and so I could bear all else—and can bear all. For art thou not mine for ever?"

And now we may drop the curtain upon this last scene, and leave these two loyal hearts to enjoy the peace and happiness so well deserved in return for their long fidelity during years of sorrow and trial.

POSTSCRIPT.

In writing a story which treats of historic events and historic characters, it seems fitting that a brief note should be appended for the benefit of young readers, informing them what liberties have been taken with history, for the purposes of fiction, and how far the narrative is to be trusted as following the actual course of events in the lives of the personages introduced.

In the case of Lord Beauchamp, it is perfectly true that he married Honora, daughter of Sir Richard Rogers of Brianstone; that the marriage was made secretly; and that he was imprisoned by his father, who did all in his power (with what motive is not very clear) to bring about a separation between the young man and his wife. It is true, too, that Beauchamp himself believed the Queen to be at the bottom of his imprisonment; that he appealed to her; and that she ordered his release. But the incidents

given in the story regarding the courtship, adventures, and subsequent career of the young couple are imaginary.

The courtship of Sir Robert Sidney has been treated in the same way. He did marry Barbara Gammage, daughter and heiress of a Glamorganshire gentleman; but there is no historical warrant for the particulars with regard to the lady and her father here introduced.

Neither is there historical warrant for giving a second wife to Lord Willoughby; and all the Furnivals are fictitious characters. The manner of life depicted, however, is one which was common in many English homes at that epoch, and the festivities and revels described in these pages all had their counterpart in history.

The Earl of Courtland and his family are also purely fictitious characters; and in reality it was Anne, sister of the Earl of Huntingdon, who was selected as the bride of the Czar.

No intentional liberties have, however, been taken with the main course of historical events as introduced into the story, and the author's endeavour has been to make them as accurate as possible.

THE END.